



Los Angeles City HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 40, Issue 1 • Winter/Spring 2020

The Marie Northrop Lecture Series for 2020

The 2020 edition of the Marie Northrop Lecture Series (MNLS) will begin on **Sunday February 23** at 2 pm in the Taper Auditorium in the Central Library. The events are free to the public, and no reservations are required.

The theme for the 2020 series, *Eye of the Beholder*, refers to the vision of Los Angeles as seen through the eyes of art and commerce which are still relevant today. To paraphrase historian D.J. Waldie, we hope to celebrate “those structures that organize daily life, commercial life, and social life that have stood the test of time.”

The first event will feature the work of architect John Parkinson with the screening of Stephen Gee’s documentary, *Iconic Vision: John Parkinson, Architect of Los Angeles*. Series curator Michael Holland will interview writer and filmmaker Stephen Gee about the film and John Parkinson’s place in the larger story of Los Angeles. Mr. Gee’s book of the same name will be available for purchase at the Library bookstore, and a signing will follow the Taper event at 4pm.

Gee is also the author of the books *Los Angeles City Hall: American Icon* and *Los Angeles Central Library: A History of its Art and Architecture*. Both are also available at

the Library bookstore and can be signed at 4 pm.

Sunday April 19 is the date for the second event with Dr. Geraldine Knatz, author of *Port of Los Angeles: Conflict, Commerce and the Fight for Control*. Knatz will discuss her book and her years of experience at one of America’s largest commercial ports. Her book will be available at the Library bookstore, and a signing will follow the Taper event at 4 pm.

Knatz is also the author of *Long Beach’s Los Cerritos Images of America* and is co-author with Naomi Hirahara of *Terminal Island: Lost Communities of Los Angeles Harbor*.

The 2020 series will conclude on **Sunday June 14** with the screening of the documentary *Bridging Los Angeles*, which chronicles the building of the iconic bridges over the Los Angeles River with special attention paid to the Sixth Street Viaduct as it transitions into a new form. A panel discussion will follow the screening.

The MNLS is presented by the Los Angeles Central Library and LACHS as a member benefit and a public service to the community. Please follow the LACHS through social media or its website for information about other upcoming events and special members-only benefits. ♦

The Los Angeles City
Historical Society
invites you to its

**GALA JAZZ BRUNCH
AND
AWARDS CEREMONY**

Sunday, March 8, 2020
The Dunbar Hotel
Los Angeles

RSVP Today!

The Los Angeles City Historical Society Gala Jazz Brunch and Awards Ceremony will be held at the Dunbar Hotel on **SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020**, Social Hour starts at noon. Brunch & program start at 1 pm. Cost is \$55 per person.

During the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, the Dunbar Hotel served as a cultural oasis for black musicians and celebrities and was the heart of the West Coast jazz scene.

The keynote speaker for the gala will be historian and heritage conservation consultant Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson. Dr. Jefferson has written extensively about the African American experience in Southern California and is the author of *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era*. We recently spoke with Dr. Jefferson about the significance of the Dunbar Hotel in Los Angeles cultural history. See page 5.

To RSVP, visit <https://www.lacityhistory.org/events>



President’s Message

February 2020

Happy New Year Everyone!

I hope you are in the mood for some jazz! On March 8, our annual gala will be held at the Dunbar Hotel in South Los Angeles, epicenter of jazz culture in Los Angeles during the jazz era. I personally am enjoying the switch from our prior holiday gala to our newer spring date. This year we anticipate having opening remarks from two elected officials representing the area as well as our annual award presentations. Our speaker, Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson, is a local author and historian who has written about African American culture in Los Angeles.

For those of you who followed the progress of our scholarship program, which was inaugurated in 2019, I hope you will continue to follow the program in 2020. Last year, we awarded six scholarships, and five of the awardees were able to present their topics at our annual membership meeting last September. I am also happy to report that one of the awardees was elected to our board during the last election.

Thank you for participating in our election this past December; the five elected board members are:

- Robert Alaniz, Returning Boardmember
- Charley Mims, Returning Boardmember
- Richard Ross, Returning Boardmember
- Maria Siciliano, Returning Boardmember
- Daniel Aburto, New Electee

Our Marie Northrop Lecture Series will be starting up on February 23 with a screening of *Iconic Vision: John Parkinson, Architect of Los Angeles*, followed by a discussion with author and filmmaker Stephen Gee. A big thank you to Michael Holland for coordinating the lecture series again this year!

Rest assured that your board is at work planning events for the remainder of the year!

As always, I thank you for your ongoing support. ♦

Todd Gaydowski, President

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28th Annual Marie Northrop Lecture Series

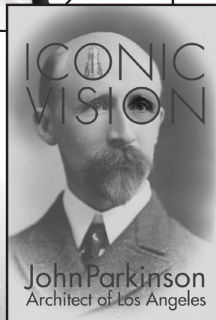
Eye of the Beholder

Iconic Vision: John Parkinson, Architect of Los Angeles

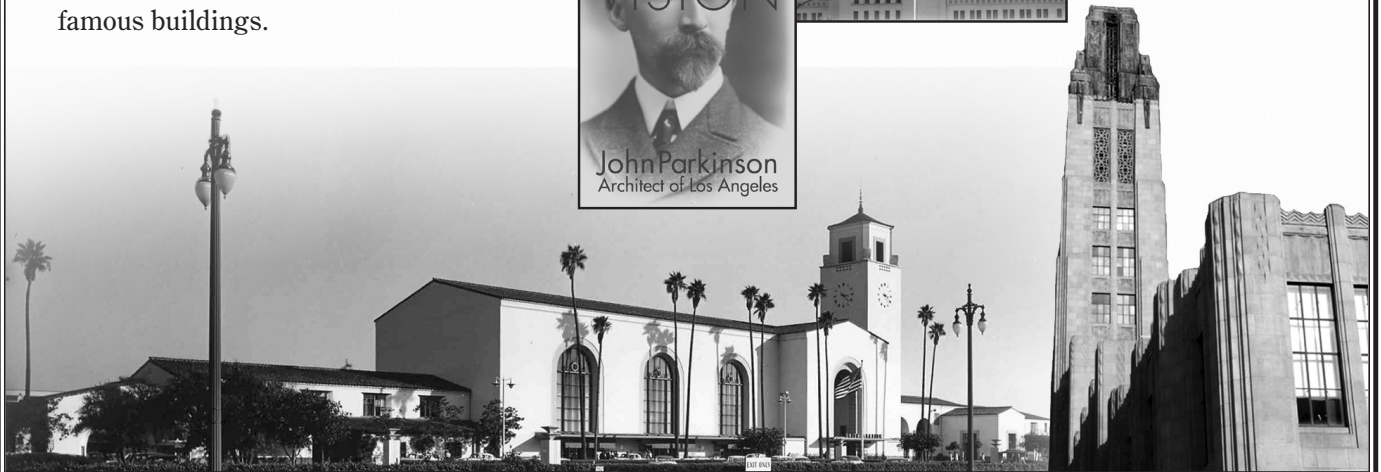
Sunday, February 23, at 2:00PM

The first in the 2020 Marie Northrop Lecture Series will be a screening of the documentary *Iconic Vision: John Parkinson, Architect of Los Angeles*, and a post-screening discussion with filmmaker Stephen Gee.

The documentary tells the story of Parkinson's influence on the development of Los Angeles through his design of noted architectural masterpieces including: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles Union Station, Bullock's Wilshire, and Los Angeles City Hall.



Join us at the Taper Auditorium in the Central Library to learn more about some of LA's most famous buildings.



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

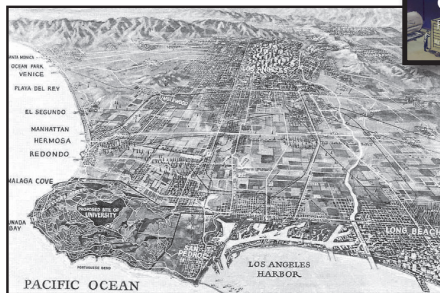
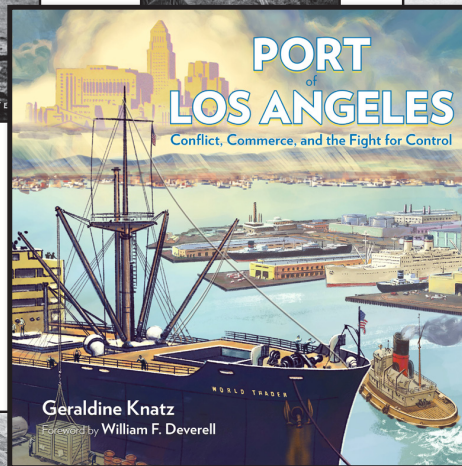
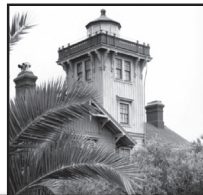
28th Annual Marie Northrop Lecture Series

Eye of the Beholder PORT of LOS ANGELES

Sunday, April 19, at 2:00 PM

“Port Of Los Angeles” matches a topic—the history of Los Angeles Harbor—with someone of unquestionable authority to tackle the subject.

Dr. Geraldine Knatz worked nearly four decades at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, her last eight years as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Harbor. She is also a LACHS Board member and has previously written about the Harbor Department and Terminal Island.



Join us at the Central Library for a discussion with Dr. Knatz about her new book.
Books will be available for sale at the Library bookstore.
A book signing will follow the presentation.

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.

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We recently spoke with upcoming LACHS gala speaker Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson about the significance of the Dunbar Hotel in Los Angeles cultural history. Dr. Jefferson is the author of *Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era*. See page 1 for more information about the Gala.

The Dunbar Hotel: Heart of the Black Community in Los Angeles

by Richard Ross

In the late 1920s, John and Vada Somerville, prominent black Angelenos, decided to build a first-class hotel that would serve the black community of Los Angeles. At that time, black people were not welcome in the white hotels, and the Somervilles wanted to build a hotel that could be a showcase for the African-American community. The Hotel Somerville opened in 1928 and quickly became known as one of the most elegant hotels in the city.

DR. ALISON ROSE JEFFERSON:

The Somervilles wanted to get the NAACP convention in Los Angeles. And the national body said there's no hotel for people to stay in. They couldn't stay in any of the white motels downtown, and there were no black hotels that could accommodate them. Most of the black hotels at that point in time would have been small and not very grand at all. And so, the Somervilles decided, well, we're going to build a hotel.

They wanted to have a show palace, and this was one of the first hotels that was specifically built for African-Americans, by African-Americans. And it was certainly one of the most luxurious.

The building had a roof garden, a beautiful public

entryway that had flagstone and a fountain with mosaic tiles. They had a dining room that could seat a few hundred people and they had this beautiful lobby, and on the balcony, they would have musicians up there playing nicely.

It was a fabulous representation of the accomplishments of the African American community here in Los Angeles during that time.

It got national coverage when it opened. When he came out for the conference, W.E.B. De Bois wrote about how beautiful the hotel was. The hotel helped to define African-Americans in Los Angeles at that time and what kinds of opportunities might be available for those who moved to this community.

Even though the hotel would soon become associated with the vibrant jazz scene on Central Avenue, it initially did not have a nightclub.

DR. JEFFERSON:

Prohibition was still going on when the Somervilles opened the hotel, and they were teetotalers. They

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Founded 1976

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Michael Holland, Contributor
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THE DUNBAR HOTEL, *continued from page 5*

were also very involved with the idea of respectability politics and wanted the establishment to be seen as a contribution to the African American community. They wanted to make sure that white people respected them.

After the stock market crash in 1929, the Somervilles were forced to sell the hotel. It was eventually bought by Lucius W. Lomax, Sr. and renamed the Dunbar Hotel in honor of the poet, playwright, and novelist Paul Lawrence Dunbar. In February 1931, the Dunbar was granted a cabaret permit, and it soon became the nexus of the Central Avenue music scene.

DR. JEFFERSON:

You had this African American community that was spreading itself down Central Avenue, and there was a budding music scene because people wanted entertainment activities and they were looking for places to perform. And so these clubs opened up.

Whites were opening clubs in Hollywood, West Hollywood and Culver City, and you got all the hot musicians who were playing for the white people in these other places, and then they were coming back over to Central Avenue because that's where they had to stay.

The musicians who were staying in the Dunbar Hotel wanted to play, and they wanted to be able to entertain the community, and so black people opened up entertainment venues to entertain their community there.

The Dunbar became known as “the hub of Los Angeles black culture” and “the heart of Saturday night Los Angeles.” Duke Ellington threw parties at the Dunbar where the champagne flowed freely. Years later, Lionel Hampton would recall that, “Everybody that was anybody showed up at the Dunbar.”

Some of the many jazz legends who frequented the Dunbar were Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, Lena Horne, Louis Jordan, Ella Fitzgerald, and Ray Charles.



Exterior view of the Dunbar Hotel, located at 4227 South Central Avenue, 1928. Security Pacific National Bank Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Other noteworthy African Americans who were guests at the Dunbar included W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Thurgood Marshall, Joe Louis, and heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the Dunbar was “the gathering spot for the crème de la crème of black society, the hotel for performers who could entertain in white hotels but not sleep in them.”

A number of other music clubs soon sprung up nearby, making the neighborhood the most vibrant music scene in the city. Next door to the Dunbar was Club Alabam, across the street was The Last Word, and The Downbeat was just a few doors down. Big Bands played the cavernous Elk's Hall a few blocks north on Central.

Before long, white music lovers began to venture to South Los Angeles to take in the scene.

DR. JEFFERSON:

It was common for white people—those who were more adventurous—to go to those clubs, and there were reports of celebrities such as Orson Welles and William Randolph Hearst and Bing Crosby being spotted at some of the clubs in the Central Avenue district.

One legend is that W.C. Fields “accidentally integrated” the Dunbar one night when he passed out in the lobby after a drunken night at the Club Alabam next door.

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THE DUNBAR HOTEL, *continued from page 6*

Exterior view of the Dunbar Hotel. The hotel is shown closed and in need of repair. Image made accessible through a grant from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, Los Angeles Public Library.

For nearly three decades, the Dunbar was the heart of African-American culture in Los Angeles. By the 1950s, however, the hotel and the neighborhood were starting to lose their luster. Ironically, the end of segregation—which had created the need for the Dunbar Hotel—also meant the end of the Dunbar and, eventually, the Central Avenue jazz scene.

DR. JEFFERSON:

The lessening of discrimination and the opening up of the hotels meant that African Americans could stay anywhere they wanted to stay, and since people like Duke Ellington would go stay at the Chateau Marmont, the Dunbar didn't have that clientele anymore.

The jukebox also had a big impact on the music scene because then you didn't need to have a live band. You could play records. And so that changed the employment opportunities for musicians.

The Dunbar hung on through the 1960s but was finally closed in 1974. For several years, the building was unused except occasionally as a movie location. The African American comedian, singer, actor, and film producer Rudy Ray Moore utilized the derelict Dunbar as a base of operations for his film productions. The 2019 Eddie Murphy movie *Dolemite Is My Name* depicts this chapter in the Dunbar's history, though no scenes were actually shot at the hotel.

During the 1980s, the building and surrounding neighborhood were plagued by poverty and gang violence. In 1987, developers started to revitalize the building.

In 2011, the Dunbar Hotel was incorporated into a low-income housing community called Dunbar Village. Preserving the Dunbar Hotel's historic brick façade, grand entry and lobby, Dunbar Village provides 41 residential units of affordable housing with amenities that include a community room, communal kitchen, media lounge, billiard table, library area, and fitness room.

In 2018, Delicious at the Dunbar, an upscale restaurant featuring Southern and Mexican food, opened at the Dunbar.

Although the famous clubs have long gone, the spirit of the South Los Angeles jazz scene carries on with the Central Avenue Jazz Festival, an annual music celebration that takes place each summer. Since 1996, the festival has featured well-known performers as well as up-and-coming future stars from the neighborhood.

DR. JEFFERSON:

It's a celebration of the history of West Coast jazz from the 1920s to the 1950s in terms of the heritage that is there, and that pride is something that comes through with the Central Avenue jazz festival. The Dunbar still resonates with the community in terms of being a landmark with historical value and also a landmark of contemporary value in terms of the housing that it's providing to the community.

It represented what opportunities were available to African Americans in terms of being able to build businesses and to have more freedom in their lives and to have a better quality of life. The African American population that came and lived in that area were seeking their California dream, looking for economic advancement. They were looking for greater social freedom equity. They were looking for a chance for a fresh start.

They were also fighting discrimination and racial

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THE DUNBAR HOTEL, *continued from page 7*

barriers in order to have a better life as best they could during that time period. And I think that that's something for those that have learned a little bit about the history of the Central Avenue neighborhood, that that still resonates with them.

The Dunbar Hotel will be a stop of the new Angels Walk LA Central Avenue Trail scheduled to open later this year. It will feature a self-guided walking tour with 15 stanchions on the street, all commemorating the history of the area when it was the hub of African American life in the City of Los Angeles. ♦



Composite photograph showing the interior of the Dunbar Cocktail Lounge, inside the Dunbar Hotel. Owner Harry Spates's portrait has been added in the upper center, ca. 1948. Shades of L.A. Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

News from the Los Angeles City Archives

The Los Angeles City Archives has been a beneficiary of the Los Angeles City Historical Society (LACHS) for many years and continues to research and preserve the history of the Los Angeles city government. This is a brief summary of our recent efforts and how you can experience them for yourself.

City Archives on LA Cityview Channel 35

LA Cityview Channel 35 regularly features digitized films and videos from several collections in the city archives in a series of 17 half-hour programs. Films from the Los Angeles Police Department, City Clerk, Public Works, and Planning Department show a Los Angeles that is different from the one we know today. Additional programs are being planned with new content from the archive. Program schedule can be found at <http://lacityview.org/schedule>

City Archives Heard on Local Public Radio

City Archivist Michael Holland is a regular contributor to the "Throwback Thursday" segment on 89.3 FM KPCC's *Take Two* program with host A Martinez. The program features stories as told by local historians on a rotating basis. Holland has brought preserved audio recordings of city



song submissions from the 1980s and LAPD radio shows from the late 1940s into the studio and told their stories. Upcoming appearances will feature more historic materials. Archived episodes can be found through the *Take Two* show link at <https://www.scpr.org/programs/take-two/>

City Archives Tours

Several times a year, the Los Angeles City Archives conducts an organized tour of the City Records Center and Archives on Saturday mornings. Tours include exposure to rare documents, artifacts, and their stories as guided by city archivist Michael Holland. Tours last about two hours and are limited to 25 people per tour. LACHS members receive priority RSVP notifications before the event is publicly announced. Follow LACHS Facebook and social media for the next tour schedule or go onto the LACHS website. ♦

Geraldine Knatz's article in the Winter/Spring 2019 LACHS Newsletter described the controversy over the construction of the Vincent Thomas Bridge over San Pedro Harbor. Less well known is the tale of a bridge built in the San Gabriel Mountains in the 1930s, a bridge from Azusa to—well, to nowhere.

Another Bridge to Nowhere

by Abraham Hoffman

Every few years a severe rainstorm will hit southern California with such intensity that citizens long afterward will recall the mudslides, the flooded streets, and the property damage. Such storms have long been a part of local history. During the Gold Rush era the town of Eldoradoville flourished briefly in San Gabriel Canyon, only to vanish in a flood of water generated by a rainstorm in the early 1860s.

To prevent the watershed of the San Gabriel Mountains from shedding its water—and mud—into hillside homes below the canyon, engineers have built check-dams, cribbing, and concrete channels to control much of the problem. However, a striking example of the San Gabriel River's potential for damage is still evident. Six miles up the East Fork of the San Gabriel River, quite literally in the middle of nowhere, stands an abandoned concrete bridge.

The bridge, constructed in the 1930s as a W.P.A. project, spanned a particularly rugged portion of the East Fork known as The Narrows. It represented the culmination of an ambitious project to connect the San Gabriel Canyon to Wrightwood near Cajon Pass. In the early 1930s, Los Angeles County, with convict labor,

commenced the construction of a paved road paralleling the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. As a project for prisoners it was ideal: there was certainly plenty to do in building a road along the steep canyon.

Perseverance paid, and by 1938 the road reached as far as The Narrows. At this point the sheer cliffs on both sides of the gorge necessitated the building of a bridge across the chasm, plus a tunnel through a portion of the mountain on the other side, before continuing the road.

Constructed at a cost (in Great Depression money values) of \$19,000, the bridge was some ninety-feet long, sixty-feet high, and wide enough for the two-way passage of motor vehicles. Concrete provided the basic ingredient, and its planners built it to last for ages. Fulfillment of this intention exceeded all expectations.

The county's plan to continue the road past The Narrows came to an abrupt end early in March 1938. A tremendous rainstorm struck southern California, and water poured out of the mountains. Walls of water descended down the outer canyons, and none was more destructive in its force than the flood that coursed down the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. The water chopped

the asphalt road into pieces, undercut the roadbed, and rendered the road completely unusable short of complete reconstruction.

The planners of the road weighed the cost of rebuilding it and decided against doing so. The uncompleted tunnel was dynamited, and surviving portions of the road were permitted to deteriorate. Since 1938, the bridge has stood alone, giving mute testimony of the power of San Gabriel mountain water. In the 1950s, the county attempted to



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ANOTHER BRIDGE TO NOWHERE, *continued from page 9*
 construct a road higher up on the canyon wall, but it never came near the bridge, and the county ended the effort since it was not cost-effective.

In recent years, the bridge has served as a destination for Boy Scouts, backpackers, and knowledgeable hikers. The U.S. Forest Service has provided primitive campsite facilities in the area. Hikers to the bridge find they must cross the stream half a dozen times, often on logs placed across the river by earlier hikers. At certain times of the year, such as in the spring, the turbulence of the water makes the hike virtually impossible. Along the way it is possible to see bits and pieces of the asphalt road, stark reminders of the stream's force. There are also some columns at the side of the stream that once held parts of smaller versions of bridges that the 1938 flood washed away. In the early 1960s, the Boy Scouts placed a plaque at the bridge; vandals, perhaps more adventurous than is usual for their breed, removed it.

Since 2010, the bridge may have evolved from being the Bridge to Nowhere to the Bridge to Somewhere. On

January 18, 2010, the television program *The Bachelor* aired an interesting date for bachelor Jake Pavelka and contestant Vienna Girardi. A helicopter took them through the canyon to the site of the bridge—apparently cast and crew and their equipment were easier to ferry to the bridge than to carry everything by muleback over the six-mile stretch up the canyon.

Pavelka, or maybe the show's writers, wanted a major challenge date for Girardi. The challenge was to bungee jump from the bridge down the canyon chasm. Girardi proved up to the task, no one was killed or injured, and a national audience witnessed the event from a bridge abandoned since the 1930s.

The bridge is not abandoned any more. Numerous hikers have made it to the bridge, taking photographs, including lots of selfies, and tied their bungee cords in full confidence that this mysterious bridge will not fall apart during their launch into empty space. YouTube has numerous videos of people who have made it to the bridge, as does Google Image, where lots of photographs of the bridge are posted. ♦

Foto East LA: Photography and the Everyday Life of East Los Angeles

by Daniel Aburto

Through rapid advancements in digital technologies, museum and archival online collections databases provide the public with an educational platform to contribute to the making of history. With its strong dedication to celebrating the past of East Los Angeles, the online collection **Foto East LA** (<https://lacountylibrary.org/foto-east-la/>) attracts visitors to its interactive site that vividly narrates the social life of East Angelenos through a community-sourced collection of digital photography. In 2013, the Los Angeles County Library first advertised the community project in hopes of encouraging the public to submit copies of family photos of life in East Los Angeles before 1980. Its successful outreach resulted in countless submissions that capture local perspectives of the city's demographic and infrastructural transformations.

Since the website's publication, the library has assembled a growing collection of over 200 pictures that highlight the social and personal values of East Los Angelenos. This online collection of private photographs details the everyday, intimate moments in East LA

neighborhoods, illustrating Japanese-American, Chicanx, and Latinx environments, religious beliefs, leisure activities, gender roles, portraiture, cultural gatherings, consumer lifestyle, and public infrastructure. It encourages audiences to imagine the ways that locals constructed a meaningful, communal world that correlated with their economic, cultural, social, and religious values.

The collection also highlights the role religion played within the growing Latinx community of East LA. Local Catholic families formed the Catholic Youth Organization, which organized religious rituals such as baptisms, marriages, and funeral services. The site prominently features visual records of these rites of passage as many East Los Angeles residents used cameras to record these significant events. As such ceremonies often remain a defining moment for Catholics, members of East Los Angeles stood—at times proud, joyous, or mournful—in front of the camera to commemorate these events alongside their friends and family. The family's decision to document

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FOTO EAST L.A., *continued from page 10*

these special moments reflects the neighborhood's intertwining of religion, community, and leisure lifestyle. For these families, Catholicism became a unifying force of their social world, as it occupied much of their leisure time away from work and fostered a sense of unity through communal work. Through these sites, church members shared their lives with neighbors and friends, creating lasting relationships from religious practices.

Part of the allure of Foto East LA is its wonderful approach to facilitating community preservation outreach, motivating residents to contribute their own stories to the history of East LA. As the site sources local perspectives of East Los Angeles social history, it showcases how residents situated themselves in a community. The site is an inclusive space that provides both Spanish and English instructions to encourage Spanish speakers to easily partake in this online collection. Locals considering digital photograph submissions can easily upload them directly to the LA County Library website or may contact the collection's archivist to set up an appointment to scan the photographs. To capture the rich details of the community's past, the online collection strives for accuracy and requests that donors provide as much detailed information of the picture as possible—including date, individuals featured, specific location, and a brief description. After filling out all the requirements, donors have the choice either to allow or prohibit the library to publicly post their names within the online collection. Once submissions are accepted and processed into the database, visitors can use these fields to navigate the collection with more precision. One such entry, "Raul Felix and Diana Guerrero on their Wedding Day, East Los Angeles, California," allows users not only to view all the submissions of the Guerrero family, but they can also observe related photographs from the same year, location, and subject by simply clicking on the hyperlinked terms in the object's description.

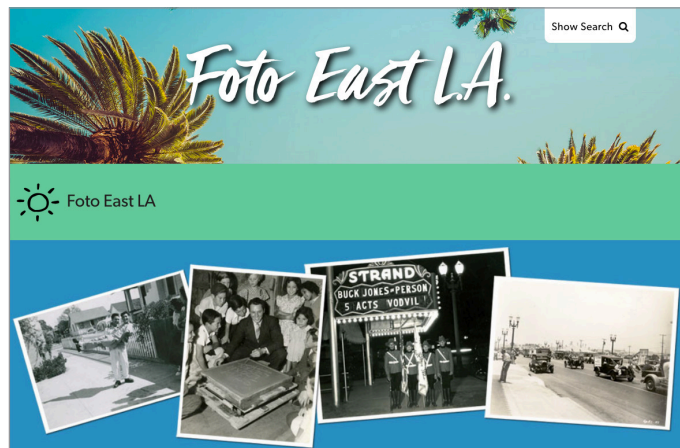
Foto East LA will most certainly appeal to scholars, teachers, and students interested in exploring the individual lives of East Los Angeles residents. The photo

collection includes insight into the evacuation and relocation of Japanese-Americans in East Los Angeles, the rise of automobile culture in Southern California, Mexican-American cultural pride, and the demographic transformation of the region occurring in the wake of a growing Latinx community. The site encourages viewers to experience the past through photography by considering how personal photographs highlight much about people's values and identity. The collection also shows how communities can work creatively to construct a shared history that in turn may also influence viewers to examine their own city history through photography. Aside from its intrinsic historic value, the site is compatible for mobile users as they can instantly download these pictures to their photo library.

The website works well when using a mobile phone, and Foto East LA is searchable through the same platform as the rest of LA County Library's digital collection.

However, in an age where the internet and social media rise as the public's preferred educational platform, the website could benefit from a more robust social media presence. Even within the last few years, history-based Instagram and Twitter accounts have popularized public interest in history and are easily accessible to people of all ages. Perhaps LA County Library archivists

can better integrate promotion of Foto East LA through their existing social medium platforms to encourage traffic and ongoing submissions to the project. Nevertheless, Foto East LA captures the liveliness of the city through photography and demonstrates how everyday people and experiences contribute to the making and preservation of the city's history. This photo collection uses photography as a tool to study how East Los Angelenos interacted in the social sphere through material culture. From the gathering of personal photographs exhibited on the site, Foto East LA shapes our understanding of the working-class experience using photography as a lens by which to examine city life. Such a collection creates inter-generational connections of identity, culture, and values. Foto East LA will inspire visitors to reimagine perspectives of and relationships to their own communities. ♦



Driver Education, Driver Training

by Abraham Hoffman

In the summer of 1955, as I approached my final semester before graduating from Roosevelt High (I was a winter graduate; LAUSD had two graduations a year until around 1967), I signed up for a driver training class. At that time the LAUSD schools had driver education, a ten-week course that dealt with safety rules and regulations for new drivers. Everyone received a booklet titled *Young Pilots* which compared driving to piloting an airplane. I never understood this analogy unless it was to convince students that driving a car without the knowledge being imported into our teenage brains was just as important as to fly an airplane without understanding how to read the gauges in the cockpit or how to pull out of a nose dive.

I completed the course. However, my taking the class was purely theoretical as my parents did not own an automobile. They were quite knowledgeable in navigating their way around L.A. through its transit system. It was not until my senior year that the opportunity actually arose to get behind the steering wheel of a car.

I wish I could remember the name of the driving instructor because next to my eighth grade typing teacher, Miss Buller, these were the two classes that have been with me all my life as I am either driving a car or typing something every day.

There were four of us students plus the teacher who met every day for a couple of weeks. The teacher, possessor of unbelievable patience, taught us how to drive. The automobile was a 1954 Ford with double pedals, a feature that enabled the instructor to slam on the brakes if the student driver was about to hit a wall or go over a cliff or some other peril because he/she forgot where the brake pedal was.

There was another feature that required us to pay attention. This was the last year teaching cars came with a gear shift. We would have to learn to shift from neutral to low to second to high or to put the car in reverse and, whatever we did, one foot had to be on the clutch pedal when shifting this gear. Teaching cars with automatic shifting came in the following years.

Both driver training and typing courses were similar in one respect: the basics came quickly, the rest of the time was practice, practice, practice. Our instructor had us

take turns behind the wheel where we went through the procedure of checking the dials on the dashboard, pumping the brakes, testing the clutch—maybe the analogy between flying a plane and driving a car was not that dissimilar.

After the first week of basic instructions, our instructor had us take turns actually driving somewhere. This meant driving a few blocks around the neighborhood. This enabled us to log in some flight time (oops, driving time—that pilot analogy again) and helped build confidence without getting too cocky about dealing with stop lights, stop signs, speed limits, yield signs, et cetera.

I did not know there was going to be a final exam, but there was, and it was a lulu. Our teacher drove to Orme Street, a few blocks from Roosevelt High. Orme Street had to have the steepest ascent in the city, if not the nation. The TV commercial for the Land Rover going up the 999 Steps in China? That was what the Orme Street hill looked like to me.

Our instructor drove halfway up the hill, put on the hand brake, and turned off the engine. He said that each of us would be taking a turn going to the top of the hill. This meant that each of us would have to start the engine, use the clutch to put the car in gear, release the hand brake, hit the accelerator pedal, and zoom up the hill. Guess who got to be the first victim? I was sweating bullets, and not because the car did not have air conditioning, and seat belts were a decade in the future. If I did not follow the exact procedure, I would be rolling backward down the hill until the instructor hit his dual brake. Worst case scenario, I would be guilty of taking five lives, including mine. Thankfully, everything worked as taught to me, and I passed the course.

As it happened, I did not get my first car until I was a freshman at Los Angeles City College and convinced my parents that taking buses from Boyle Heights to Vermont Avenue took too much time.

By the 1990s, the LAUSD had given up the driver education class and turned over driver training to private schools. But I have to wonder: What about those kids whose fathers taught their children to drive by maneuvering around an empty parking lot? Were you one of those kids? Ah, those were the days. ♦

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Shown: Construction of a new storm drain, Sept. 7, 1927. Verdugo Road and Glassell Avenue storm drain looking toward the Los Angeles River from an outlet of an existing culvert under the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. Collection of Los Angeles City Archives Department of Engineering Historical Photos.

Other useful resources are available on our web site as well: <https://www.lacityhistory.org>