



The Echo

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Where the Past is Present

Fall/Winter 2022

Altadena's Libraries...Past to Present

by Pam Wright

It's been said the first public library in Altadena was founded in 1908, when Miss Gertrude Hinman placed an encyclopedia and some donated books on a new shelf in a classroom at Calaveras School. A model of multi-tasking, Miss Hinman taught all three grades. The Child's Study Circle of Altadena (one day to become the Parent Teacher Association) later donated funds for a "rest room", which had a couch and chairs and books to borrow.

Even the earliest Altadenans had literary curiosity. Only two years after the first settlers moved in, they began a literary society and produced a handwritten newsletter, "The Reservoir."



Librarian helps young reader

Entrance to library 1965

it wasn't always easy. It should be noted that various women's clubs' pressure on establishing public libraries was significant throughout the nation during those years and Altadena's women were part of that movement.

In 1913, Altadena was established as a branch of the Los Angeles County Library organization, opening up more opportunities to share not only children's books, but also to serve the growing demand by Altadena booklovers.

It was an immediate success! "The Pasadena Daily News" (Jan. 17, 1914) reported the library was "enjoying great popularity with residents of the community." Mrs. L.P. Stauffer, Librarian, reported circulation in the first month totaled 395 volumes.

Local groups began a fund-raising effort to maintain the library, to add books and,

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President's Letter *by Jane Brackman*



First of all, thank you for your strong support of our mission during our annual membership drive. If you haven't yet sent in your membership fee, I encourage you to do so, using the form on the back of this newsletter or online at www.altadenahistoricalociety.org.

I'm happy to announce that starting October 21, 2022 the Archives will once again be open to the public on Mondays and

Fridays from 10 am to 1 pm and by appointment. We're looking forward to welcoming and assisting you in person!

In this issue we've focused on how Altadenans working together get things done. Our town was named in 1883 by developers William and Frederick Woodbury, but it has never been given a formal designation or incorporated as a city. As part of unincorporated Los Angeles County, we've never had a mayor or a city council with administrative powers.

Altadenans have always taken pride in our independence and individuality, with our own idea of who we are and what we want our community to be. More than once we've resisted incorporation or merging with our larger neighbor Pasadena. We've also been subject to rules and regulations aimed at the entire county, which has often proved challenging.

So how has Altadena retained its own identity, given our lack of autonomy? By working together to influence our County guardians.

Since our first years as a community, we've formed groups of like-minded citizens to lobby for safe neighborhoods, planning, business interests and the like. Not always successfully, and not always with the best of motives, but citizens working together have been responsible for remarkable things.

In this newsletter we take a look at some of our efforts and accomplishments: forming our own library district, creating a community center, preserving historic resources, and almost having our own school district. We think you'll agree that with our citizens involved, Altadena works.

***Make your voice heard--
vote for your town council
representative on Tuesday
November 8 or Saturday
November 12, 2022
altadenatowncouncil.org***

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(since hours of operation were Monday and Thursday afternoons, 2p.m. to 4p.m.) a movement was begun to boost circulation and attendance by pressuring authorities to expand branch days/hours and add many new books and magazines.

Increasing school enrollments meant libraries and classes needed more space. So in June, 1917, another community effort created a library committee to study acquiring land and money for a permanent site. In 1918, a second branch was begun at Andrew Jackson school. The committee met two months later to open discussion of moving a bungalow to the Altadena Grammar school grounds as temporary quarters until a new site was funded.

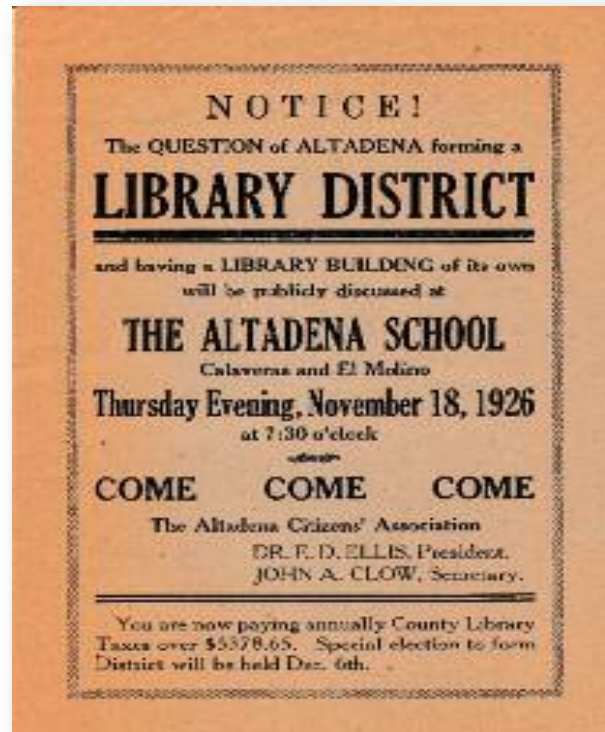
This was not a popular idea and yet another committee was formed to address more issues. Apparently, although Altadena was paying \$5,378.65 in taxes to the county library fund, only \$2,500 of that amount came back to the community.

It seemed building a separate Altadena library under the oversight of a 3-member County committee was the best answer. Many well-known speakers urged voters to create an Altadena Library district and after an election (209 in favor, 123 against), the district was formed in 1926. It was the first separate library district formed in L.A. County and was funded by the Altadena Citizens' Association, but operation of the

library was still contracted with the county.

Fundraising began and an \$80,000 bond issue was passed, and Mrs. Zane Grey (Dolly) held a meeting to form the Altadena Library Board of Trustees. The Board arranged for a bungalow to be moved from Edison school to Altadena Grammar School to serve as the first individual library quarters where Dolly Grey initiated a children's "Story Hour" series. At the first event, Mr. & Mrs. Carl Moon, writers/illustrators of Native American lore, entertained the children with stories of tribal life.

In May of 1928, once again, the Board called on Altadenans to patronize the library to demonstrate the need for a central building. Circulation figures for that year rose to 1,828!



In 1929, a location was found on Lincoln Avenue at Crosby Street and the Andrew Jackson branch library was moved to that site. Relocated in 1957 to its current site at Lincoln Avenue and Ventura Street and named the Arroyo Seco library. It closed after Proposition 13 was passed in 1978 and

Altadena's Libraries *continued from page 3*

reopened in 1991 at which time its name was changed to the Bob Lucas Memorial Branch Library and Literacy Center in honor of its most active supporter.

Also in 1929, a hotly contested election related to library funding and districting resulted in claims of illegality, improper behavior at polls and replacement of 2 Library Board members. These claims were dismissed later that year.

By 1936, the need for a large central library was clear. Land at the corner of Lake Avenue and Beverly Way was purchased, again using local money and some WPA funds, and a new library was constructed, one of a number of Carnegie Libraries supported by millionaire Andrew Carnegie nationwide. Designed by Frederick Marsh, husband of the Historical Society's



Historic library building on Lake Ave. and Beverly Way –1938

more centrally located.

The Trustees of the Altadena Library purchased two acres of property (formerly the estate of Col. G.G. Green) at Santa Rosa Avenue and Mariposa Street and, in 1963, a bond issue passed, raising the \$500,000 needed to undertake the project.

During National Library Week, the site was dedicated with "appropriate ceremonies" and Mr. Boyd Georgi, AIA, showed his Mid-Century Modern design concept.

On August 28, 1967, the new Main Library opened its doors for service, realizing the vision of so many Altadenans over the decades. Its beautiful design and landscaping by Eriksson, Peters and Thoms enhance a vital and innovative center which today serves more than 16,600 patrons both digitally and in person.

The staff is innovative, creative, and excited by their mission to "bring people and ideas together." This means connecting the community to so much more than books, including technology, digital resources, the Library of Things (recently featured in the Los Angeles Times), and an incredibly rich selection of programs and services for all of Altadena.

Now, with active community participation, the Altadena Library District is growing again, embarking on new renovations to ensure their buildings, grounds, and services meet 21st century needs. Miss Gertrude Hinman would be so proud!



The 1960s ground breaking for the present day Altadena Library on Santa Rosa Avenue and Mariposa Street

founder Josephine Marsh, it was in use for nearly 30 years with Gladys Babcock as head librarian.

In 1952 the district became truly independent when it dropped its operation contract with Los Angeles County and assumed complete control of the libraries.

In 1959, when the Friends of the Altadena Library was formed, they commissioned a professional survey which determined a library four times its size was required, one

Altadena Discovers Its Historic Resources

by Tim Gregory

In the mid-1980s, Scripps Hall, an historic 1904 house at 209 East Mariposa threatened with demolition, was saved by the community's fight to preserve it. Following that successful campaign the Town Council established a heritage committee to explore ways that other historic resources could be preserved. The committee soon became an independent 501(c)3 organization, calling itself Altadena Heritage with a governing board of 21, with myself as chairman.

The board soon realized how little in the way of information they had about the significance of other historic buildings that were such a large and unique part of our urban fabric—their architects, builders, and early owners. Without this background knowledge, there was no way Altadena Heritage could lobby effectively for the preservation of our historic resources.

At that time, Altadena's governing jurisdiction, Los Angeles County, had a very weak historic preservation program and could offer no assistance. So we decided to undertake its own historic resources survey of the community. This was just about unheard of in California's historic preservation circles—a citizens' group taking on such a massive project without any governmental leadership or taxpayer-financing.

We divided Altadena (including the "Pasadena 91104" unincorporated area) into four quadrants to make the project a little more manageable and to finance the survey in increments as we went along.

Using a number of fundraising devices, the board raised the tens of thousands of dollars necessary to pay consultants and hire newspaper researchers, but most of the labor was contributed by members of our

organization and the community.

After our consultants had conducted their windshield survey, making lists of the addresses of all the historic resources they could see as they drove our streets, we sent out teams of photographers to take photos of each of the 4,000+ buildings and districts that were listed.



We created maps locating the resources and conducted meetings for the residents of each quadrant to share our results. Researchers pored over newspapers, vintage magazines, and contractors' journals to discover as much as possible of the histories of all the listed properties.

Various obstacles were overcome. The County did not issue building permits until 1927 which meant

there was no official documentation of the origins of our wonderful Craftsman and early Period Revival residences. Altadena addresses were completely re-numbered in 1928 and 1941 (not to mention street name changes over the years) which created a lot of confusion in trying to track histories.

The whole survey process took about three years, ending around 1990. Over forty years later, the database we started is still being used by Realtors and homeowners to learn about the history of their properties. It has also served as a basis for the nomination of a number of sites to the National Register of Historic Places such as Christmas Tree Lane.

We were able to avoid a lot of time-consuming bureaucratic hassles and maintained control of the process, both financially and administratively, from start to finish. With that in mind, I can say that the historic resources survey of Altadena was a successful example of citizens daring to take things into their own hands against considerable odds.

Altadena Gets a Meeting Place

by Jane Brackman

Altadenans have always felt the need for a place for residents and organizations to meet. Because we're unincorporated, Altadena never had a county funded city hall or central meeting place. Instead the public library, Eliot school, the Woodbury House, the Davies Building and even private homes shared space to host meetings and store paperwork.

But in April, 2001, a long awaited Altadena Community Center moved a step closer to reality when the county Board of Supervisors (with the support of Supervisor Mike Antonovich's office) approved spending 1.9 million on a 7200 square foot facility to be built on a county owned lot just west of the Sheriff station on Altadena Drive.

This project culminated many years of stops and starts for a town meeting center.

In 1989, a board of 15 Altadena residents along with Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich's office, was formed to establish a Town Hall. These people represented a cross section of community organizations that would potentially use the center, including Sheriff's Support Group of Altadena, Altadena Town Council, Altadena Historical Society, Altadena Heritage, Altadena Branch NAACP, and Altadena Chamber of Commerce.

Sussy Nemer, Senior Field Deputy for Kathryn Barger (and formerly Mike Antonovich) said that the committee helped figure out the location, the size and scope of the building and eventually focused on how it would operate.

She reminisced, "The first community meeting I ever attended while working for the Supervisor's office was the first meeting of the initial planning committee sometime in 1998! She added "I drafted the agenda, sent out the invitations, and manned the sign in table. The meeting was held at the senior center."

The Hawkins house, a 106 year old Victorian

mansion that stood on the southwest corner of Lake and Sacramento, where a dental clinic sits today, was identified as a significant Altadena structure in danger of demolition due to development.

The idea was that the re-use of this historically significant property would reflect the past, present, and future of Altadena. The community center planning committee



The Community Center hosts the Sheriff's Toy Drive

considered moving this house to an empty lot between the fire station and sheriff department on El Molino (which is now the site of a public parking lot)

This plan, if at all feasible, would require the entire community to be involved for successful completion. The thought was that the building could be used for various community groups for offices, meetings, special events and parking.

The developer agreed to donate the house if the county approved the development plan, and the community could raise the funds to move it. But after the committee began investigating the possibility, community groups were in disagreement as to the feasibility of such a task.

Even after \$40,000 was raised, the foundation poured, and the house was moved from its original site to the vacant lot, the community remained split on the concept. And the county was barely lukewarm.

The proposed development for the Hawkins House property was denied as presented to the County Board of Supervisors late in 1989. Following many more years of effort, plans to convert the mansion into a community center were scrapped and the house was demolished.

But the county offered an alternative plan, and one that appealed to just about everyone: a new facility to be built on a county-owned lot just west of the Sheriff station on Altadena Drive. Funding would be provided primarily by the county.

Interviewed in the April 2001 edition of the Pasadena Star News, Bob Klomburg, chairman of the town hall planning committee, was enthusiastic. "This is one of the best things that's ever happened to Altadena" he said. Klomburg credited county Supervisor Mike Antonovich with making sure the community had input on the plans and for getting the project started. "Instead of the county saying 'This is what you get', they asked 'What do you guys want? They're the ones who really jump-started this project'" Klomburg added.

Architects Robert Rosenberg and Susan Narduli provided design and consultant services for the project, and construction



The Hawkins House on moving day

a self-contained area for the Historical Society archives, plus space for County staff and attic storage for each tenant organization.

Initially the tenant organizations, now including Quality of Life, formed the Altadena Community Center Advisory Board (ACCAB) to share building management – hosting the reception desk, keeping records, scheduling meetings and events. But as use of the building increased, the county took over its operation. Today ACCAB advises the county on what's needed and meets every two months.

For nearly 20 years the Community Center has been a popular place for meetings, public programs and events and celebrations. Monthly Town Council meetings are broadcast from the community room and the new permanent historical exhibit in the lobby provides another example of successful community action. With its 20th anniversary coming up in July of 2023 we can look forward to a grand celebration.

The project was the culmination of an effective public/private partnership that included the planning committee, dedicated volunteers, several county departments, and vital community business partners who donated many thousands of dollars.

Since Altadena's first years as a community, we've formed groups of like-minded citizens to get things done. And though not always successful, the Altadena Community Center is proof that sometimes we make it work.



The Altadena Community Center 730 E. Altadena Drive

began in March 2003, and with only a few wrinkles to iron out (The owner of the Woodbury house sued to stop construction), the Altadena Community Center opened that July.

In it were offices for the community organizations mentioned above, a large community room for community events, and

When Altadena Almost Seceded from the Pasadena Unified School District

by Justin Chapman, Pasadena Now journalist and anchor of NewsRap on Pasadena Media

After the Pasadena school district shuttered several high-performing schools in Altadena in 2005, a teenage Altadena Town Council member and a group of Altadena residents launched an unprecedented — and ultimately unsuccessful — campaign to form an Altadena Unified School District

As the youngest person ever elected to the Altadena Town Council (ATC), at age 19, I felt an obligation to help my unincorporated community have a say in decisions that affected its young people. At that time, late 2005, a major issue facing Altadena was the ongoing closure of high-performing elementary schools by the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) school board due to declining enrollment.

On December 20, 2005, the board voted to close four schools, three of which were in Altadena: Noyes, Edison, Allendale, and Pasadena's Linda Vista. Those schools became "surplus properties" that the board planned to sell to private interests. The Altadena community's voice was left out of this process.

In response, I secured ATC's unanimous support that same night to found and chair the 16-member advisory body's Education

Committee. I drafted several resolutions outlining what the Altadena community wanted for its schools and surplus properties, which was to keep them intact for future educational uses, as opposed



Justin Chapman ATC campaign photo

to leasing or selling the properties to the highest bidder. These resolutions received unanimous support from the Education Committee and ATC.

In creating the Education Committee, ATC was supporting an effort to "explore the desirability and possibility" of starting a petition process to have Altadena "secede from PUSD" and create its own school district: the Altadena Unified School District (AUSD), according to the committee's chartering document that I wrote. ATC's chair at the time said my idea was "causing waves."

The following month, three Altadena residents — Bruce Wasson, Maurice Morse, and

Shirlee Smith — filed a petition with the LA County Office of Education (LACOE) on January 13, 2006, to get an AUSD secession movement under way. They became the three chief petitioners.

"We believe that the unification of the Altadena Unified School District, which would create a district with more than 4,000 students, will provide Altadena students with the highest quality public school education in safe and secure facilities; reduce the distance Altadena students must travel in order to attend a public school; increase the sense of community identity within Altadena; improve the efficiency and fiscal responsibility of school district management; and increase the voice of Altadenans in the governance of their public schools," the chief petitioners wrote to LACOE.

That essentially precluded the Education Committee from doing the same, had we eventually chosen to pursue that path, because LA County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, who represented Altadena, made it clear that he only wanted one petition effort. At least someone was taking action, but in retrospect an ATC-led campaign may have been a better course of action.

Although ATC had considered the idea of an AUSD before, most recently in 2000, this was the first time residents had actually petitioned LACOE to draft such a petition. ATC and its Education Committee never ended up formally supporting the AUSD petition.

If petitioners could collect signatures from 25 percent of the town's registered voters, LACOE's Committee on School District Organization (CSDO) would hold public hearings and complete a feasibility study which would've determined what would happen to PUSD if another district was formed. If PUSD would be harmed in any way by the formation of an AUSD, the petition would be denied.

Such a study would have provided critical information for the community, whether or not an AUSD was formed. It would have focused on the fiscal condition of the school district as it related to the unification of a new district and provided insights into AUSD's possible demographics, as well as the number of students expected to attend each of the new district's schools, which, with the state paying roughly \$7,500-10,000 annually per student, would have been the main source of operating revenue.

After that, a report would be presented, community meetings would be held,

and the county Board of Education would vote to either deny or approve the petition. From there, the proposal would be sent to the state Board of Education. If it decided to proceed, either Altadena residents or voters district-wide would vote on the matter in the next general election for the final decision.

Between January 2006 and September 2010, the AUSD petition campaign collected 7,073 signatures, 782 more than the required 6,875. But in-fighting ultimately led to two of the chief petitioners — Morse and Smith — and several volunteers dropping out of the effort. I was re-elected to ATC in June 2007 but then got accepted into UC Berkeley, so I shortly thereafter resigned and moved to the Bay Area.

On September 23, 2010, Wasson submitted the AUSD petition to LACOE, according to CSDO secretary Daniel Villanueva. The county had 30 days to validate the signatures and 60 days to hold a public meeting if the threshold was met.

But during a presentation LACOE gave to the PUSD school board on October 12, 2010, county officials told board members that nearly 25 percent of the signatures were invalid because they did not match current voter registration records. The petition fell short by 1,495



verified signatures. Wasson decided not to pursue more signatures. Altadena's effort to secede from PUSD was over.

Fittingly, that same month PUSD announced it was considering closing Loma Alta, Burbank, and Jackson elementary schools, all located in Altadena. The message was clear, and in 2011 they closed Burbank and Loma Alta. There are only three PUSD schools left in Altadena today: Altadena, Jackson, and Eliot.

Ultimately, I believe the best thing Altadena can do to obtain more representation in not only its school district affairs, but also other aspects of community planning may be to incorporate as a city (i.e. secede from LA County). The idea has been on the front pages of local newspapers and on the minds of community leaders for more than a century. And it's something Altadenans should take into serious consideration once again.

Chapman will tell the story of rocket scientist Jack Parsons at our October quarterly meeting. See page 11.

News from the Archives

by Jean Phillips

2022 has been a year of community involvement for the Historical Society. We co-sponsored a Juneteenth event with the Altadena Libraries and Sapphos Environmental at which we introduced our Ellen Garrison Clark Scholarship Fund by awarding \$1,000 scholarships to two outstanding Muir graduates.



Exhibit opening in the Community Center Lobby

14 Decades of Altadena History, a permanent exhibit in the Community Center Lobby made possible with help from many organizations and volunteers, opened to enthusiast response in July and our 2019 exhibit, *Theatre Americana*, traveled to Altadena's Main Library in September, giving more people the opportunity to learn about this unique part of our history.

Inside our office, Board member Deirdre Del Re, with the help of volunteer Dina Zanrosso and two summer interns from PCC, is making sure our archives are up to professional standards. This includes receiving and accessioning some interesting donations.

Some recent donations include a grant deed for the Krenz property dated 1938 accompanied by a summary of the property from **Jeanne Thompson**; U.S. photos and negatives of 1938 flooding and debris flows from **Norman H. Brooks**, Professor Emeritus at Cal Tech; plus a book bag from Edison School circa 1975-1976 and two Altadena pennants from **George and Nancy Rothwell**.

More donations include a 1964 march on Frankfurt, KY souvenir program and a song

sheet of freedom songs from **Martha Naomi King**, whose mother attended the march; a Janes cottage postcard and slides of some Altadena Rose Parade floats from **Daria Topousis**; and "Diary of a Contraband," the story of an escaped slave who joined the Union Navy written by his great-grandson William B. Gould IV from **Jean Phillips**.

Gary Wilkins sent us Volume 3 of "Air Racing Results," a listing of air races which contains the results of a 1921 race held in Altadena. Twenty photographs of E.J. Longyear's (Edmund Jacob) winter home at 1375 Hull Lane, Altadena (1917-1924) were donated by his great-granddaughter, **Martha Burns**.

We've received some valuable digital donations from historian **John Steven Fode** which greatly enrich our digital research capabilities, among them a searchable PDF of Hiram Reid's history of Pasadena and



Altadena Sandborn Maps. In addition, a set of computer disks with information about Mount Lowe that originally came from Fode, has been donated by **Paul Rollins**.

And finally, three boxes of information about Christmas Tree Lane have come back to the archives. **The Christmas Tree Lane Association** stored them for us before AHS moved into our Community Center home and have carefully taken care of them since. Now this information will be combined with the files located in the archives to create a comprehensive history of this famous event.

ALTADENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS: A LOOK BACK AT ROCKETRY PIONEER JACK PARSONS 70 YEARS AFTER HIS EXPLOSIVE DEATH



Jack Parsons

Former Altadena Town Council member and journalist Justin Chapman will discuss his research and articles on Jack Parsons—whose pioneering rocketry work helped lead to the founding of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)—at the Altadena Historical Society’s quarterly program at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, October 17, in the Altadena Community Center. The program, free to AHS members, is open to the public. Donations are gratefully accepted.

Jack Parsons led a double life: rocketeer and explosives expert by day, black magician by night who worshipped Aleister Crowley, had an unfortunate run-in with L. Ron Hubbard, and called himself the Antichrist. Parsons and Caltech’s Frank Malina made key rocket test breakthroughs in the 1930s



and 40s in the Arroyo Seco bordering western Altadena that led to the establishment of rocketry as a science and the founding of JPL.

But their lives and careers were upended in the 40s and 50s as the FBI investigated them for their unconventional affiliations—Parsons for sex magick and espionage and Malina for Communism—which unfairly diminished their achievements and robbed them of the credit they deserve.



Speaker Justin Chapman

Seventy years ago on June 17, 1952, Parsons died at age 37 in a puzzling, city-shaking explosion in his home lab in a converted coach house behind a mansion on Millionaire’s Row in Pasadena. Was it suicide? An accident? Murder? We still don’t know for sure, and probably never will. Chapman will give a talk on what we do know about the mysterious rocket scientist who changed humanity’s relationship with the stars forever.

**7:30 p.m. Monday, October 17,
in the Altadena Community Center**



Altadena Historical Society
730 E. Altadena Drive
Altadena, CA 91001-2351

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The Echo

ALTADENA HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

730 E. Altadena Drive
Altadena, CA 91001

(626) 797-8016

email:

altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com

website:

altadenahistoricalsociety.org

**October Program –
the Double Life of
Jack Parsons!
page 11**

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

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