



The Echo

Volume 91

Number 2

Where the Past is Present

Fall/Winter 2019

Voices of Altadena

Stories From Our Past

"We were having dinner at Bono Corso when Nelson came up to me and said, "I remember you from Tiny Tots when we played with Play Do. I play with dough a little differently now." He was the owner of the restaurant.

These were the words of Jane Lepisto, who ran the Tiny Tots program at Farnsworth Park for twenty-one years with the help of the children's mothers. The program cost was \$3 for three months. Jane and Walter Lepisto were interviewed in 1998.

Walter Lepisto was the resident Recreation Program Director of the park for seven years, beginning in 1951. He, Jane, and their two children lived in the small home located on park property. Their rent was \$25 per month.

Walter recalls Farnsworth's baseball and tennis activities; Jane, her office duties (her home was the office), her work with the Tiny Tots children's program, and special holiday events.

When Walter was promoted to another position, they moved to another Altadena home. The small Farnsworth Park



Jane Lepisto with the Tiny Tots program, Farnsworth Park. 1950s

house was never again used as a residence. Today it serves as the Parks and Recreation office.

Jane Lepisto is just one of the people whose voices "echo" in our files. Their oral

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President's Letter *by Kathy Hoskins*



In the 1930s, a woman named Sarah Noble Ives went door-to-door in her neighborhood collecting the stories of her neighbors. She worked for years compiling these stories into a complete written history of Altadena.

The information included in her book, *Altadena*, is based on the oral histories she collected. Published in 1938, it is still one of our most valuable research tools because it gives us



Sarah Noble Ives

wonderful access to our past. We have been collecting Altadenans' stories ever since.

This issue of *The Echo* is focused on the voices of Altadena—stories we have gathered and made available in digital and written form on our website and in our files. We're also collaborating with the Altadena Library and Town Council

to collect additional stories from all parts of our community. (See the next page for more information on this project.) We want our collection to grow.

We'd like to thank our members for making this year's membership drive so

successful. Premium and supporting members enjoyed a lecture on Historic Register houses and a tour of the Keyes Bungalow this month—part of their benefits at their membership level. We plan another special lecture later in the membership year, which continues through spring, 2020.

We'd also like to welcome three new volunteers—Alyse Beale, Rod Holcomb, and Joe Parise. From researching to digitizing, from social media to slide preservation, they all contribute to our mission.

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Historic Register House—Keyes Bungalow, built 1911

Hearing the Voices of the Underrepresented

In late August, the Historical Society, the Altadena Town Council, and the Library co-hosted an event at the Bob Lucas library to spotlight the experiences of long-time residents, to hear stories from people of color, and encourage the attendees to share their own stories or those of their neighbors.

The collaboration started as an effort to ensure that the history we capture and share accurately reflects the community. Although Altadena is one of the most diverse communities in Los Angeles, the majority of the history in our collections is about the wealthy (and often white) aspects of the community. In what the group hopes will be the first of many events, we brought together three sets of people to tell their stories.

Shirley Ward, cousin to Bob Lucas, and **Letitia Wright**, one of his grandchildren, talked about Lucas the man and his passion for literacy and education. It was through Lucas's insistence that the library on Lincoln Avenue remained open. "He was small in stature but a giant in imagination and accomplishments," Ward said.

Both women talked about the racism they experienced, in Altadena and in the wider world. Their stories of persevering despite adversity were inspiring and drew enthusiastic applause.

Japanese-American **Robert Kikkawa** read a heart-felt statement about the hardships his parents faced during World War II and after, as they tried to rebuild their lives; and **Itsy Ota**, whose family owns Johnny's Sport Shop, talked about her life growing up in Pasadena, the years of internment, and her

experiences as a business owner. When asked if her family experienced racism, she said, "Everybody treated us great. When people are about to do something fun like go fishing, they are happy."

Cindy Guzman, who was born and raised here, talked about how her father fell in love with Altadena when, as a child, he played in the orange groves with a friend, and how, after they bought a house in Altadena, some of the neighbors were not happy. One started a petition to remove

them, but her parents prevailed.

"No matter what part of Altadena you live in, everyone has the same hopes, dreams, and aspirations," she said. "Altadena is not two communities on either side of Lake; it's one."

We will be releasing an audio recording of the stories told at this event and we are already putting together a plan for how we can capture more stories. If you have a story you want to share, send us an email at altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com.

— by *Daria Topousis*

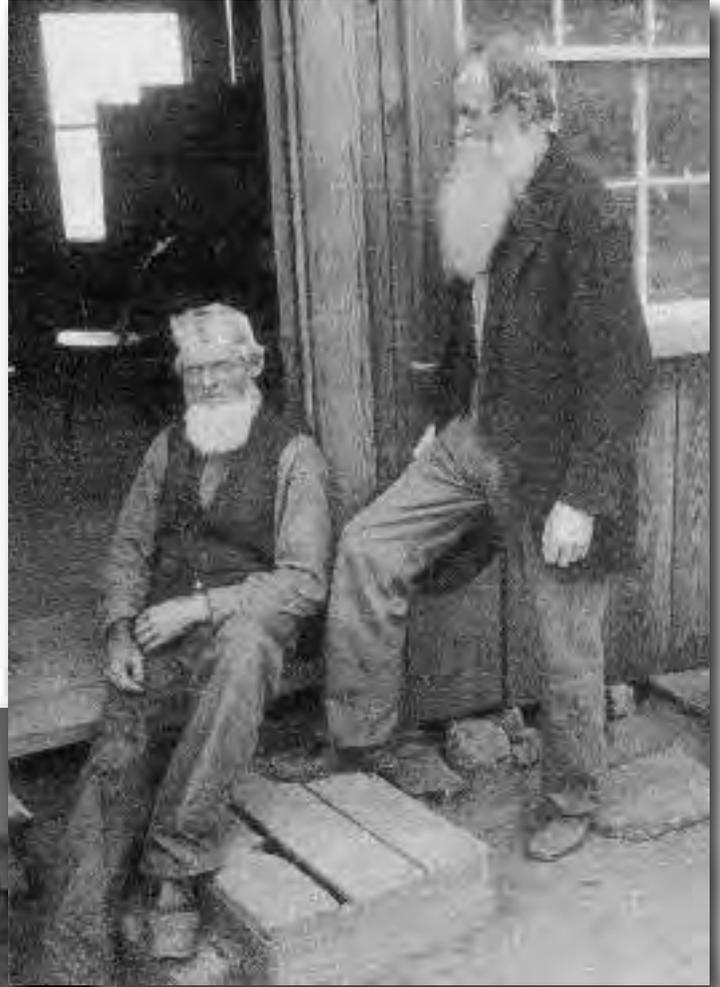


Shirley Ward, cousin to Bob Lucas, being interviewed at the Bob Lucas Library in Altadena

What's Up at AHS?

We're pleased to have been able to share some of Altadena's history with La Crescenta Valley Historical Society, by hosting a visit to our archives and giving a talk at their monthly meeting on Altadena's "Wild and Wonderful Women." We've also spoken about area disasters at the Altadena Country Club.

Our First Saturday Open Hours (2-4 p.m.) provide a monthly opportunity for everyone to visit the Archives during the weekend. Each month we feature a different aspect of our collection: maps, Mt. Lowe, home research, and photo scanning among them. George and Cynthia Null will share their experience researching their Meadowbrook/Sinaloa



Owen and Jason Brown, sons of abolitionist John Brown, at their cabin in Altadena, 1880s.



Richard Bale signing his new book, *An Altadena Boyhood*

neighborhood using our collection and other sources, on November's upcoming First Saturday. 11-2-19.

In July, Paul Ayers gave a well-received

talk on Owen Brown and the Brown family at our quarterly program. (Look for more Ayers' talks in 2020.)

In addition to the oral history collaboration described on page 3, **we're partnering with the Altadena Library** on several other projects. We launched our new book, *An Altadena Boyhood*, by Richard Bale, at the main library to a standing-room only crowd.

We're assisting with the library's Millionaires Row History Walk at the end of this month, and our current exhibit, *Theatre Americana Remembered*, will be moving to the library community room in the next few months.

Our collection continues to grow

Dave Boucher gave us photographs and negatives from a lumber company fire on Lincoln Avenue; **Charles Blakeslee** donated photographs, maps and postcards from his father, Alpheus; **Ben McGinty** brought a



Inside view of the Benziger house, built in 1898 on Santa Anita Avenue and Mariposa Street Altadena.

photo of the Balian house, and **Dave Miller** contributed photographs of Altadena's Old Fashioned Days.

Other photographs include images of the Benziger house from **Debbie Hemela**, a framed panoramic photo of Altadena in 1908 from **Diane Lang**, aerial photos of North Altadena, and a snow scene at the corner of Allen Avenue and New York from **Billy Sage**.

Andrea Escher gave us a packet of information on her great grandfather Victor Falkenau, a well-known Chicago builder who moved to Altadena and helped install the first lights on Christmas Tree Lane.



Kyle Warnak donated eight postmarked postcards of Mount Lowe – some of which were new to the collection. **Jean Phillips** donated a DVD of Pablo Miralles's John Muir High School documentary, *Can We All Get Along?*, and **Robert Kikkawa** contributed *Infamy*, historian Richard Reeve's book describing Japanese Internment during World War II.

— by Jean Phillips



Alpheus Blakeslee photo of LA County firemen preparing toys for Christmas. Late 1920s

Voices of Altadena *continued from page 1*

histories tell of civil rights, mountain adventures, Mount Lowe trips, growth and development, and life in small town Altadena, providing primary source information for researchers and history lovers.

Thanks to a generous gift from Ninarose Mayer, our oral histories are now available in digital form. A few have written transcripts. All are unedited. And some were recorded four decades ago. So if you hear abrupt pauses and endings, we apologize.

What follows is just a taste of the many stories these oral histories tell. You'll find many of them on our website, at www.Altadenahistoricalociety.org/. Select "collections" and "oral histories."

Visit our archives to access other oral histories, transcripts, and other written recollections of our past. (See page 11 for some examples.)

And if you have a story to tell, please help us add your voice to this valuable collection. We want all the voices of Altadena to be heard.

Adele Barnes (interviewed in 1993)

"I began to see that the idea of reconciliation among different groups is so important. If you shut yourself off, believing only in your own ideas and your own way of doing things, you are a very uninteresting package and you don't do much for the community."

Community activist Adele Barnes lived on Rubio and Maiden Lane during a time when there were still orange groves in the neighborhood. She was interviewed when she was 101.



Adele Barnes

Direct, acerbic, sometimes humorous, always well informed, she shares her recollections and

opinions about personal experience and civic affairs in Altadena and Pasadena.

She talks about the Farnsworth family, Pasadena's attempt to annex Altadena, her 50 years' worth of work with the League of Women Voters, segregation in schools, women's suffrage, and her husband's career at JPL among other topics.

Jesse Gilton (born 1904, interviewed 1977)

"Altadena had better-paying cab routes because there were more white people and more elderly."

The grandson of a slave, Mr. Gilton came to Altadena in 1947. For most Black people the only jobs available in Altadena were as house servants. He chose instead to work for Tanner Taxi, the "first Black cab driver" in this area.



Jesse Gilton

His neighborhood on Harriet, west of Fair Oaks, was all white when he moved in. He said that he bought the house from a white family who were moving because "a colored man" lived across the street.

His interview is filled with interesting stories. One night, he "picked up a drunk at Colorado/Fair Oaks, and there was blood on his shirt. I drove him toward San Bernardino (he talked nice to me and I talked nice to him). He asked to be dropped off near Big Bear. I got a \$5 tip! He had robbed a filling station!"

Bob Barnes (interviewed 2018)

"I'm so lucky I had the opportunity to teach."

An extremely popular educator at John Muir High School in the 1960s, he



Bob Barns and students—1960s

inspired Muir's Conservation Club students to demonstrate against commercial development of what is now the Cobb Estate at the top of Lake. The kids raised enough money and awareness to buy the estate at auction and then turn it over to the Forest Service.

Bob was there during the difficult days of Pasadena school system integration. Hear his comments on school board politics, teacher demonstration and other controversies during the era.

Freddie Brooks (age 70 at interview--1993) Jeannette Killinger (72 at interview)

"Pasadena was the first challenge to the 'separate but equal' doctrine." (referring to the U.S. District Court's decision against Pasadena School District's effort to avoid integration).

Friends and teachers who were actively involved in school and neighborhood integration in the late 1950s and 1960s, they talked about the Altadena Human Relations Committee, welcoming African American neighbors, and other issues related to integration in Altadena in the 1960s.

They were two of the founding members of Altadena Neighbors, an organization formed to help new residents of all colors

feel at home in their new neighborhoods. It was organized when one black neighbor was the victim of a house fire and then had her garden hoses cut.

J. Scudder Nash (interviewed October 1989)

"My father and I were on Mt. Wilson in 1917 when 100 mph winds blew down a Mack Truck. We saw Secret Service men checking it out. They thought it might have been sabotage."

Nash, who was born in 1906, talks about his grandfather's store (Nash's in Pasadena), where he worked as a boy delivering food in a Model T.

His love of the outdoors is evident as he talks about night hikes and shares many memories about Switzer's Camp, including how a team of burros had hauled a piano in. He remembers church services at the Chapel on the Cliff, going for walks after, and visiting Mount Lowe.



Medical building built by Dr. Haines Sr. on the corner of Mariposa Street and Fair Oaks Avenue.

Dr. Charles Haines Jr. (Interviewed March 2000)

"My father began his practice out of his home, like they did in the east."

A practicing physician at the time of this interview, Dr. Haines talks about growing up at Mariposa & Fair Oaks, and how Altadena was sparsely settled. He describes how his father built the medical building at

the corner of Fair Oaks and Mariposa and cared for Scripps home residents pro bono.

He talks about the trolley tracks on Fair Oaks, attending local schools (Edison, Eliot, and Pasadena Junior College) and the changes brought about by the medical discoveries.

Jirayr Zorthian (Interviewed in 1994 at age 83)

“Art is like religion,” he said. “Don’t undermine the other guy.”

Definitely one of a kind, artist and eccentric Jirayr Zorthian was multi-talented, with many interests, many famous friends and many experiences. (Listen for his remarks about “the jet set.”)

Living up to his reputation as a raconteur, he recalls escaping Armenian massacres as a child, his education and his artwork, including, murals, exhibitions, “nude women,” and his controversial design for Altadena’s last Rose Parade float.

His Altadena home for 49 years, “Zorthian Ranch,” once called a living work of art, was the site of various art projects reflecting his philosophy of reuse and recycle, a children’s summer camp,



Jirayr Zorthian

and bohemian parties. He raised goats, chickens, and vegetables and provided living space for several artists.



Takeo and Fumiko Yuge

Fumiko Yuge (born 1914, interviewed May 2003)

“When we got off the train [at the Tulare racetrack] we were surprised to be met by armed soldiers lined up and pointing their rifles at us.”

Fumiko Yuge reads her own written description of her family’s history in Pasadena and Altadena, her husband Takeo’s, work as caretaker of the Scripps/Kellogg estate, and the family’s experiences during World War II.

From Tulare the family was sent to the relocation camp at Gila, Arizona, where the living conditions were quite poor. “The ground was our floor, cots were our beds,” she said.

After the war ended, they started a new life in Harbor City, but the Kelloggs asked them to return to Altadena to care for the estate and their orange groves. They lived in a small cottage on the estate where Mr. Kellogg promised they could stay rent free as long as she and her husband lived.

— by Pam Wright

Book Notes

Altadena Memoirs

These four written memoirs continue our focus on the voices of Altadena. You'll find them in our reference library and our files. We invite you to stop by and enjoy them on the page.

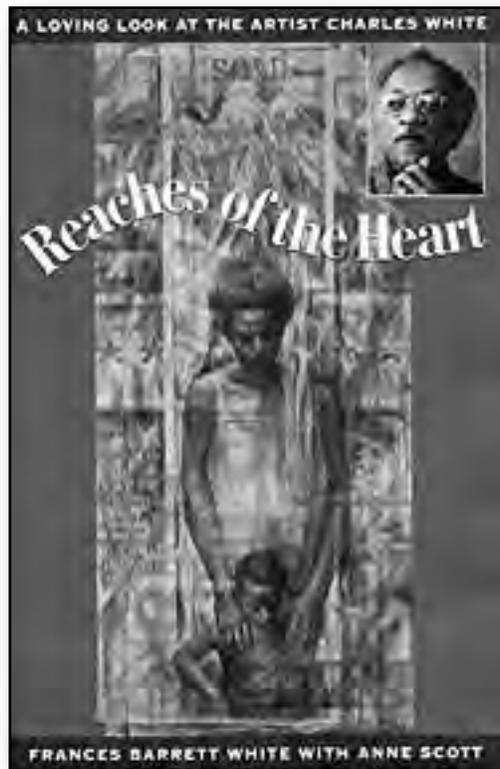
Reaches of the Heart by Frances Barret White (with Anne Scott)

This is a love story between Altadena residents Frances White and her husband, noted artist Charles White.

An interracial couple during times of prejudice, and stringent laws against miscegenation, the couple managed to prosper and maintain their loving marriage. Active in movements to overthrow segregation, the Whites moved in circles of very well-known friends. They toured the world, attending exhibitions and selling his paintings.

In a letter to Frances Charles wrote, *"Ours is the love I used to dream of as a child, the kind I searched so desperately for as a youth and the one, as a mature man, I had come so dangerously close to despairing I would ever find."*

Ranch Life Fifty Years Ago—a manuscript by Mary Agnes (Brigden) Crank



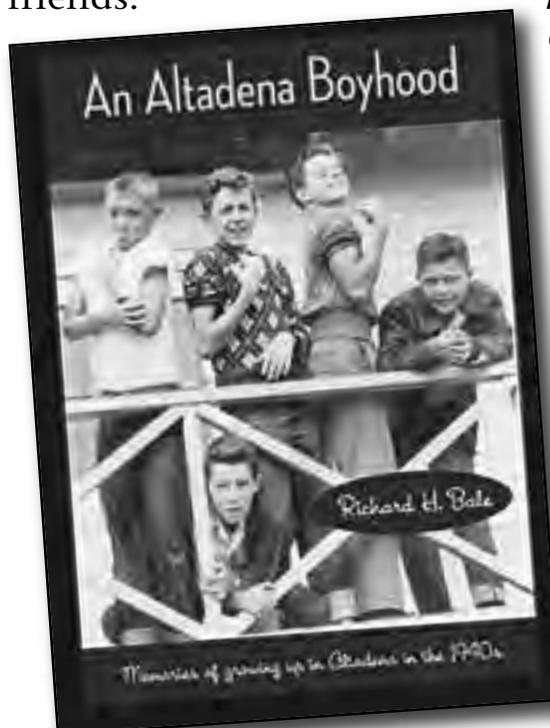
In 1876, Mary Agnes, her husband, James, their son Albert and Mary Agnes's brother, Albert, came to California on a week-long journey from the East. In this 1925 account of their lives in the Altadena area, she wrote with humor, insight and great detail. She told of "pickling season" a stubborn Chinese man who worked in the house and refused to leave their employment, and a stubborn but "clever parrot" whose favorite phrase was "Oh hell!"

Despite the benevolent climate and beauty of the area, she wrote candidly of loneliness. But she also said, *"I am glad we were so fortunate to have come soon enough to experience something of the flavor of the early life of the country and that there still*

remained for us a little of the glamour—a sort of reminiscent glow over the land—of its romantic past, a glow so rapidly fading, and soon gone forever in the hustle and bustle of these automobile days."

An Altadena Boyhood by Richard H. Bale

If you grew up in the 1940s or 50s or you're just interested in Altadena life during



those times, you should read this book. It's fun! And it's available for purchase at our archives or at our website, altadenahistoricalociety.org.

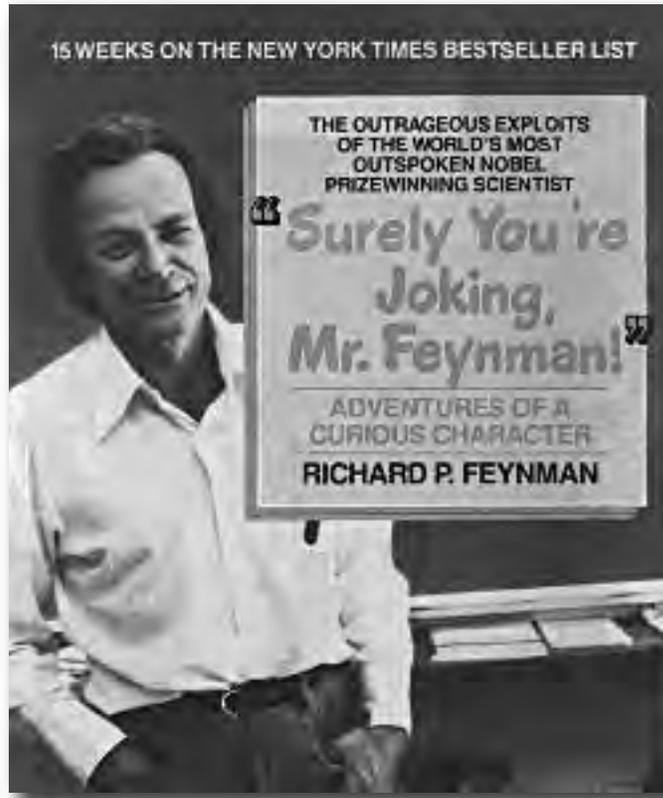
Richard Bale, who came to Altadena in 1939 at age seven, reminds us of the Altadena during the WWII-era, and he does it with charm and good humor.

He remembers local stores and gas stations, soda fountains and high school hangouts, and the orange groves and farms that were soon developed into housing and grocery stores.

"Having a paper route taught me several things," he says. "Some people aren't as bad as they first appear to be; some people aren't as good as they first appear to be; and a flat tire can ruin your whole day."

The book is illustrated with many photos of Altadena life in this era—friends, stores, street cars and "hot rods."

Praised by Star-News Public Editor Larry Wilson and with a foreword by local historian Michele Zack, An Altadena Boyhood is the perfect Christmas gift for Altadenans, lovers of memoirs, or anyone interested in small town life in the 1940s. All proceeds from the book go to support the Altadena Historical Society.



***Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* by Richard Feynman**

Altadenan Richard Feynman was a genius, an outspoken lecturer, and Nobel Prize winner (physics). He greatly expanded the understanding of quantum electrodynamics, translated Mayan hieroglyphics, and played bongo drums at parties.

He loved languages and learned to speak a little of many.

His book contains fascinating accounts of trips to foreign nations, discussions of physics with Einstein, discussions of gambling with Nick "the Greek" and leading a samba line in Brazil. Interested in almost everything, he spent many happy hours observing

ants, dragonflies and techniques for slicing green beans, and spent time at Esalen soaking in nude pools and enjoying discussions with pretty women! (He made no secret of being interested in pretty women!)

Speaking of science, he said, *"The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool. So, you have to be very careful about that. After you've not fooled yourself, it's easy not to fool other scientists. You just have to be honest in a conventional way after that."*

— by Pam Wright

Coming Events

We have a fantastic line-up of events for history lovers in the coming months.

- **First Saturday Open Hours.** Informal conversation with George and Cynthia Null on how they researched their neighborhood. Nov. 2, 2-4 p.m. AHS Archives
- **Pop-up Museum Exhibits** featuring Altadena golden oldie images. AHS Archives November/December 2019
- **Eyes on Altadena.** AHS annual exhibit featuring work by local photojournalists Walt Mancini, Herb Shoebridge, and Terry Andruess. Opens January 2020, date to be announced.
- **Paul Ayers on Foothill Cabin Culture.** January 27, 7 p.m. Altadena Community Center

FREE

Altadena Historical Society Presents:

Toypurina and the San Gabriel Mission Tongva Revolt

**October 28, 2019, 7:00 p.m.
Altadena Community Center
730 E. Altadena Drive (next to the Sheriff's Station)**



The mission era in California history is fraught with oppression and forced migration of tribes to mission land. In the late 1700s, soon after the San Gabriel Mission was built, a group of Tongva tribe members revolted against the Spanish.

The leader of this revolt, Toypurina, was a young woman known today as the Joan of Arc of California. Angered by the theft of Tongva lands and the disruption of the Tongva way of life, she led her tribe members on a brave, but ultimately futile, revolt against the Spanish rule.

Kat High, Hupa Indian from northern California, will lead this engaging and informative talk about an important time in San Gabriel Valley history. She is an advisor to several Native American cultural centers and museums in California and has been trained by traditional elders in Native American land management.

This program is open to the public. There is no charge for Altadena Historical Society members; donations from non-members are appreciated.



Holiday Shopping at AHS

Find great gifts for family and friends at the AHS archives or on our website.

- *An Altadena Boyhood*, by Richard Bale, \$15
 - *Altadena's Golden Years*, by Robert Peterson, \$20
 - *Man, Mountain and Monument*, by Mike Manning, \$20
 - *Ride the Devil Wind*, by David Boucher, \$20
 - High-resolution color photos of "Alta Dena" orange crate labels, \$20 per set
 - High-resolution digital images of historic Altadena, \$20 each
- Plus California sales tax and shipping charges (if applicable.)*



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VISIT OUR BLOG!

altadenahistoricalsociety.blogspot.com

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

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You can now join online: <http://www.altadenahistoricalsociety.org/join.html>