



The Echo

Volume 96

Number 2

Where the Past is Present

Fall/Winter 2023

A Brief History of the Arroyo Seco's Cabins and Resorts

by Paul Ayers

Starting from the time of Pasadena's founding, its citizens looked to the north, to the great mountain barrier of the San Gabriels, and were drawn to it, looking for a way to enter it and discover its secrets. Don Benito Wilson's trail to the mountain bearing his name was one way but it was hard, and Pasadenans and visitors to the town were looking for an easier route. They found it in the Arroyo Seco.

Initially, exploration of the canyon was limited to rangers and hunters. Then, in 1883 a young couple, Bob and Elizabeth Waterman, on their honeymoon trip, camped at the head



The Arroyo Seco camp near "Switzer-Land"

a camp which catered to Pasadena locals and tourists alike.

Reaching the camp was an adventure. The trip started with a stage ride from Pasadena to Las Casitas in what is now the Meadows District of

Altadena, and continued by

horse, mule or foot to the resort.

Although the camp attracted thousands during the 19th Century, it was never an economic success. In 1890, Mr. Walker died and his heirs did not want to continue to support the camp. In 1894, Commodore Switzer, suffering from failing health, left the resort. Then the ravages of the great Arroyo Seco fire of 1896 caused the camp to close for 9 years. Although it reopened in 1905 under Clarence Martin, former proprietor of Mt. Wilson's Martin's Camp, it was not to rise and surpass its former glory for another 15 years.

It was in the second decade of the Twentieth Century that two developments led to an unprecedented boom in

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of what is now known as Upper Switzer's Falls. Encouraged by the Watermans' stories, in 1884 "Commodore" Perry Switzer backed financially by Pasadenan Harvey Walker and assisted by the Watermans started

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President's Message *by Jane Brackman*

Supporting Local History

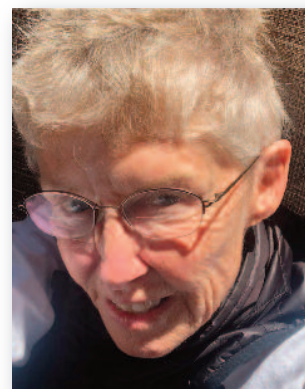
Thank you for the support of our mission during our recent membership drive. We appreciate all of you who renewed or joined AHS, and everyone who donated items to our archives. There's still time to renew or join on our website or by using the membership form on the back of this newsletter.

During the past quarter we've held our annual Ellen Garrison Clark

scholarship fund luncheon, supported the installation of the Robert Owens trail sign in El Prieto Canyon, participated in the 20th anniversary celebration of the Community Center, and hosted talks by Paul Ayers and Barry Schweiger, author of *Rockitecture*.

Right now we're holding training sessions for a group of new volunteers. In October you can look forward to a talk by Jemela Macer, author of *Between Two Worlds – An Armenian-American Woman's Journey Home* (see page 11) and the installation of gravestones for Ellen Garrison Clark's husband and sister at Mountain View cemetery on November 18.

Our knowledge and understanding of Altadena's history comes from people who lived it, people whose families have deep roots in the community, and people who collect documents, photos, artifacts, letters and memorabilia. Our ability to preserve and share these stories is made possible by our volunteers. In other words, we depend on people like you, without whom we



couldn't exist.

We'd also like to thank our sister organization, Altadena Heritage, for donating their Altadena house history files to our archives. With all Altadena's house histories now centralized at AHS, that information will be more available to people interested in learning more about their homes.

This edition of the Echo features examples of how our collection grows: a reprise of his popular talk on cabin culture by historian and long-time collector Paul Ayers, descriptions of many donations we've received, and the story of two long-time Altadenans we learned about when their daughter visited AHS. We hope you enjoy it.

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See page 11 for October program details.

recreational use of the Arroyo Seco. The first was the Forest Service's "Forest Summer Home Initiative." Started in 1912, the program offered low-cost cabin site rentals throughout the Angeles National Forest; one of the program's most popular locations, due to its proximity to Pasadena, was the Arroyo



Below Falls Canyon – 1920

Seco. In addition, private landowners, most notably the Gould family which owned land just above Pasadena's Arroyo Seco water works, also leased cabin sites. As a result, by the 1920s, there were over 200 cabins between the mouth of the Upper Arroyo Seco [today's site of JPL] and Switzer's Camp.

The second development was the building of a modern [for the times] highway up the canyon. Up until 1919, travel to the leased cabins and the Arroyo resorts was very difficult. An old wagon road had been improved in 1913 but it still had some 33 stream crossings, which meant it was, for all practical purposes, impassable at least three months a year. Then, at the beginning of the 1910s, the Southern California Auto Club

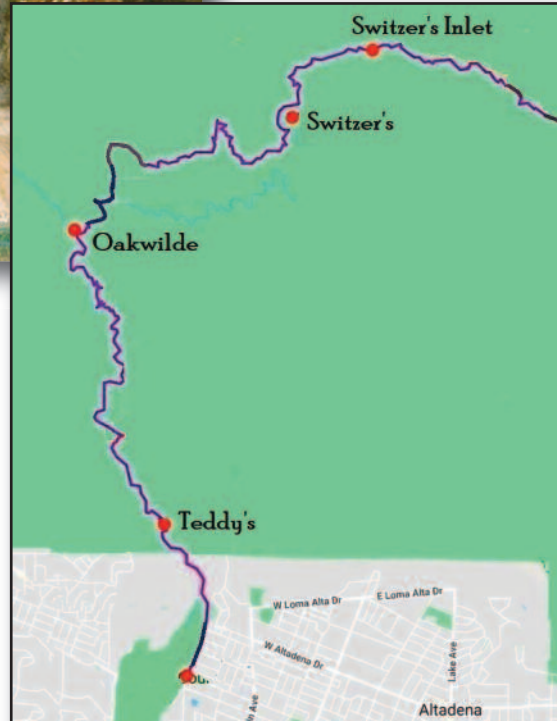
began promoting the idea of a modern highway starting in Pasadena and heading north through the Arroyo Seco and on to Mount Wilson. The highway had two goals, to increase recreational use of the mountains, but also to aid in the deployment of fire-fighting equipment; devastating wildfires would strike the mountains in 1913, 1919 and 1924, and the public mood was that something had to be done. Eventually construction of the road became a joint project of the County of Los Angeles, the City of Pasadena, the Forest Service and the State of California. Because of disputes over funding between the state and the other parties, the Arroyo Road as it came to be called only made it 5 miles up the canyon, and ultimately, in 1929, its role

as a gateway highway to the interior of the San Gabriels was supplanted by the current Angeles Crest Highway which took the "high route" on the west wall of the Arroyo. Nonetheless, until the end of the 1930s, Arroyo Road was an official state highway.

The cabin initiative and the building of Arroyo Road led to a flourishing community of cabin owners that lasted for over two decades. In addition to major

cabin clusters on the Arroyo Seco, the canyon's tributaries, including Fern, Pine and Dark Canyons, also boasted multiple groups of cabins.

The developments discussed above also led to the flourishing of three resorts created to service the area's recreational users. The traveler up Arroyo Road first encountered Teddy's Outpost founded by Theodore L. Syverston, on land leased from the Gould



family. Located about one and a half miles from the Upper Arroyo mouth on a bend in the creek, Teddy's was a rustic affair having a store and six cabins. For the weary travelers, however, Teddy's offered a shady respite from the dusty road where they could put up their feet and have a cool drink. Unfortunately for Teddy, the City of Pasadena, which had come to see all recreational users as polluters of one of the city's major water supplies, the Arroyo Seco,

relay marked the end of motor vehicle transport in the Arroyo. Here guests transferred to burros or took "shank's mare" to cover the remaining four miles to Switzer's Camp.

As mentioned before, in 1905 Clarence Martin took over Switzer's following its near demise at the end of the 19th Century. Martin managed the camp with marginal success until his death in 1911. It remained for the next owner, Lloyd B. Austin, to make

Switzer's a household name in Southern California.

Austin discovered the camp in 1911 while hiking up the Arroyo Seco; it was love at first sight. After borrowing money from friends to purchase the camp, he moved his wife and four young children to Switzer's and in

January 1912 assumed control. It took only a few years for Austin and his family to transform Switzer's into a thriving operation.

At first Austin called his restored resort "Camp Losadena" but the name failed to catch on. Then he changed the name to "Switzer-Land;" that name was retained for the 24 years that the Austins operated the business.

Switzer-Land's heart was its general store/restaurant called the "Boulder Lodge." Scattered around the property were an assortment of cottages with fanciful names like, "Climb-Inn" and "Sunnybrook." Amenities at camp included a tennis court, croquet, a library and an open air dance floor. While official capacity was 185, on busy weekends as many as 400 visitors could be found on the grounds, many sleeping outdoors on cots or in sleeping bags.



Switzer's Camp – October 1907

obtained the land where it was located from the Goulds in 1925, and promptly threw Teddy, and the dozens of cabin owners leasing from the Goulds, off the property.

Three and a half miles up the canyon from Teddy's was Oakwilde [also known as "Oak Wylde" and "Oak Wilde"] opened by J.R. Phillips in 1911. The resort was located on seven and one-half acres at the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and Dark Canyon, and once reached by Arroyo Road, became a popular tourist spot. The resort centered around a large stone building which contained a general store, restaurant and dance hall; live music was provided daily either by a piano player or a band. For overnight guests, cottages and tent cabins were offered.

A short extension of Arroyo Road beyond Oakwilde led to Switzer's Relay Station. The

The crown jewel of the resort was the “Christ Chapel” built on a precipice 200 feet above Switzer’s Falls. Financed by donations and designed by Arthur B. Benton, architect of Riverside’s Mission Inn, the chapel was dedicated in June 1924 by several Pasadena ministers.

The final major event in the camp’s history was the arrival of the Angeles Crest Highway to the Arroyo above Switzer-Land in 1934. The resort built a road from the ACH down to the resort, and at about ½ way, where the road crossed the Arroyo Seco, erected a general store and gate-house called Switzer’s Inlet. Guests arriving by automobile could either park at the Inlet or venture down the canyon to the resort. Bad weather tended to close this lower road.

Austin retired in 1936 and the camp was never the same. The resort was bought by Ransom Callicott and Clifford Clinton, owners of the well-known chain of theme restaurants, Clifton Cafeterias. Two years later they left to be followed by a succession of owners; E.R. Swanson was the last proprietor, running the resort from 1948 to 1959, when the camp closed forever. Upon closure, the land reverted to the United States; shortly thereafter, as part of the Forest Service’s policy of removing fixed structures, all the permanent buildings were razed, and the chapel was destroyed by explosives.

For the Oakwilde resort and the cabins leased from the Forest Service in the Arroyo Seco, the end came sooner. Two major factors caused the demise. The first was the great rain/flood event of March 1938. In the deluge, Oakwilde was severely damaged and a quarter of all the cabins in the Arroyo destroyed. The second was the acceptance by the Forest Service of the City of Pasadena long held belief that recreational users, specifically cabin owners and guests of Oakwilde, caused more trouble than they were worth. Pasadena argued that the cabin owners polluted Pasadena’s water supply. The Forest Service came to the conclusion that the cost of infrastructure repair



“Christ Chapel” built 200 feet above Switzer’s Falls

necessary to keep Arroyo Road open and the cabin owners and resort guests safe was not justified in light of the few members of the public directly benefited.

The *coup de gras* for Oakwilde and the cabin owners north of what is now Paul Little Picnic Area was the decision to build an eighty-one foot tall debris dam about a mile south of the resort. The Brown Debris Dam as it came to be called, cut Arroyo Road, thus dooming Oakwilde and the cabins north of the dam. Oakwilde was ordered closed and the cabins north of the dam removed in 1942. A subsequent order ended the leases of the 38 remaining cabins below the dam; all of these were removed by the end of 1943.

Today, all that is left are the ruins. So far I have identified 211 cabin sites in the canyon in addition to the remains of the three Arroyo resorts. It is my hope that some day a formal catalogue and map of the remaining ruins of the Arroyo’s recreational heyday will be completed and available to historians and the exploring public.

Lives Well Lived

by Pam Wright

In August, Joyce Miles came to the Altadena Historical Society's office to share the story of her parents and her childhood home.

Although she described them as "just ordinary people", her parents were a remarkable couple whose determination and courage are inspirational. Abraham and Doretha Coleman were each born in small Texas towns. They married and moved to Milwaukee where, with an Engineering degree from Prairie View University, Abraham worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. Doretha was a beautician and a seamstress. Joyce describes them as "extremely creative and innovative."

Like many Black people seeking better lives after World War II, they came to Los Angeles in 1945 and settled in Watts. He worked for the City of Los Angeles as an engineering draftsman and Senior Civil Engineer, designing freeways, highways and bridges. Among those was the Santa Monica Freeway, its access streets, and parts of Mulholland Drive, in Beverly Hills. He was one of only two African American Registered Civil Engineers in California when he retired after 26 years.

They moved to Altadena in 1961. Over the years, Abraham brought every family member from Texas to live here. He took his "eldest son of the clan" status seriously.

Because Doretha knew her enslaved grandfather had come from Western Africa, they decided to visit that area in 1973, curious and looking for family connections. While in Ghana, they "just happened to drop by" a Peace Corps office and applied. They would earn \$125 per month – not to mention having a life-

changing experience.

A few months later, they found themselves in Nairobi, Kenya, capital of a new nation with ambitious plans for public housing and infrastructure. Achieving independence from Britain was a long, difficult and bloody struggle and the new President, Jomo Kenyatta, was eager to move into a modern world.

They left Africa and the Peace Corp during a period of internal tension but returned when Abraham began working directly for the new Kenyan government with

the well-known Isaac Wanjohi (Director of Housing Development) on a World Bank-funded plan to provide 500 homes in Dandora, a Nairobi suburb. The idea was for



**Abraham and Doretha Coleman
at their Altadena Home**



**The Colemans at Third African Conference on Housing
Nairobi – April 1976**

the government to clear land, build foundations/infrastructure for the homes and educate new owners so they could finish the project themselves. Some of these projects still exist, in one form or another.

While Abraham worked for the government, Doretha served as a counselor



Kenyan hitchhiker

with the Salvation Army children's home in Kabete.

During those years the Colemans traveled throughout the country, marveling at the wildlife and the people. They collected art, native crafts and wooden sculpture.

In Doretha's diary, she wrote of a trip to see Masai dancers. "The dancers made a circle around us. One Italian lady was scared stiff,



Doretha Coleman—Kisumu, Kenya 1973

as she thought they were going to eat us...It was a very exciting day." They were able to hire drivers and take wildlife photos, but because there was no real "tourist" trade during the 1970s, they would have been required to mail their exposed film out of Africa to have it developed.

Eventually, these photos were put onto slides which were widely shared on their

return. Both Abraham and Doretha gave public presentations on their experiences and Kenya in general to many various groups.

Abraham said "Life there is much slower and more valuable as a result. I spent most of my life building Los Angeles's freeways and most of my time driving along them to get to work."

In an era of growing appreciation and awareness of African culture and history, they were surprised by African Americans' lack of knowledge about African technology, achievements and daily life. Doretha said, "They won't even believe Africa's got television!" (Later photos showed actual toilets...making her point.)

In 1979, they left Nairobi and returned to Altadena. But travel had become important, and they continued to explore Africa and collect art in other parts of the world. Family photos (now developed in Africa) show them in Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, South Africa and parts of Europe. One family story tells of how they were stopped by men with machine guns at the airport in Entebbe because a military raid was in progress.

Even as a retiree, Abraham took a job for the California Newspaper Service Bureau as a public record researcher and private investigator, finally retiring at age 78 in 1993. He and Doretha returned to their Altadena home, overlooking Hahamongna, where Joyce fondly remembers seeing wildlife and learning to love animals.



Joyce Miles

Abraham passed away in 2000 and Doretha lived until 2011. We would like to thank Joyce Miles for sharing their story and increasing our knowledge of the Altadena African American community. A lifetime Altadenan, Joyce is an artist who creates vibrant portraits, some of which are found at joycemilestheartist.com

New to the Collection

by Deirdre Del Re

As the year 2022 came to a close, the AHS Archives received several interesting photo donations: one from **Glenn Ramos** who donated 46 photographs with captions of local area floods during the winter of 1955-1956 and another photo collection came from regular contributor **Paul Ayers** who donated 23 photos taken at the July 12, 2003 opening of the Altadena Community Center.

In January, 2023, author **Kathleen Lesko** donated her book, *Black Georgetown Remembered* co-written with Valerie M. Babb and Carroll R. Gibbs.

We received four interesting donations in February: **Michael Fagan** brought us an interesting soft bound booklet from 1934 called *Truth on Canvas* written by Roy L. Brown, a businessman who shared inspirational biblical messages. Author **Paul Rollins** who now lives in Georgia, sent us 4 CDs/DVDs with photo images of the Crank and Brigden Families along with *Pasadena, a Heritage to Celebrate*, plus images and text called *Early Pasadena Hotels* and *Pasadena Portrait*. **Benjamin Fenton** donated *The Deodars of Altadena* brochure and **Helen Crisp** sent us a vintage Market Basket needle packet, a common



1956 flood – Loma Alta Road near Stonehill Drive

promotional item given to customers during the 1930s-1950s.

In March, we received seven donations starting with a very large collection of Mt. Lowe related items from **Mike Post** who became intrigued by Mt. Lowe

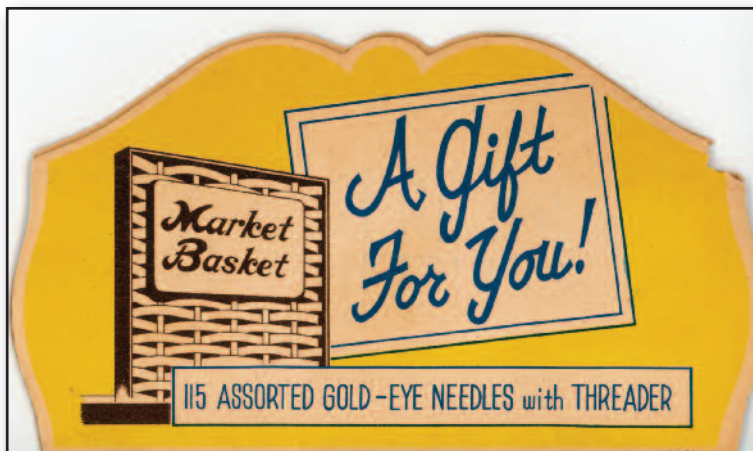
history while exploring the old ruins in the early 1970s. Mike's interest led to collecting which is a benefit to AHS and its members. The Mike Post Collection includes 29 souvenir spoons,

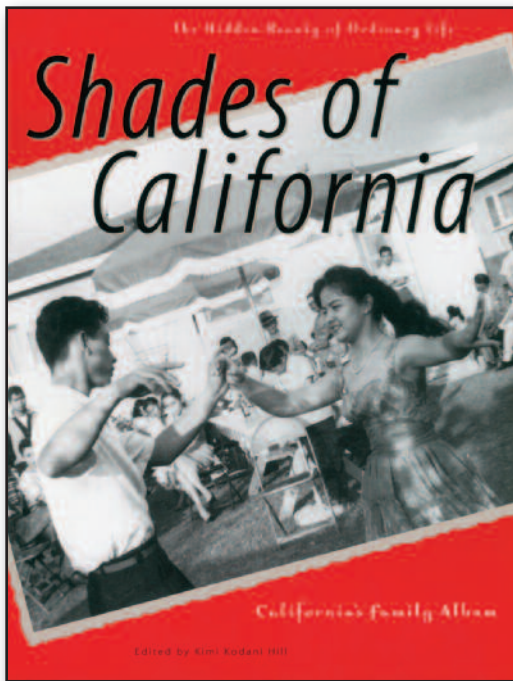


Mt. Lowe Souvenir spoon

5" binder of ephemera (post cards, pamphlets, brochures) with approximately 500-800 items, 15 Books, 2 VHS Tapes, 18 items of ephemera, 19 issues of the *Echo Mt. Echoes* newsletter, and a ceramic relief decorative plate depicting the Incline at Echo Mountain.

We are still in the process of cataloging these items which involves (as with all donations) listing and describing each item and attaching a record number to them. Eventually all that data gets transferred (using





Library of Congress approved controlled vocabulary) into PastPerfect, our Collection management program, along with a scan of that item.

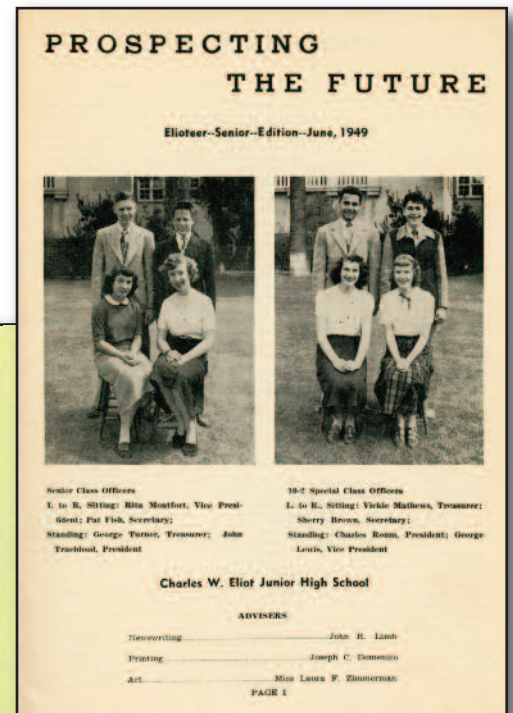
Tim Gregory, The Building Biographer, donated a

biography of a house connected to the E. J. Longyear Collection – a family of prominence that owned two Altadena properties in the 1910s and 1920s. **Deirdre Del Re** donated *Flying Free, America's First Black Aviators* by Philip S. Hart which she found in a Mammoth Lakes thrift store. **Cantwell Anderson** donated historical drawings of the La Vina Sanatorium buildings designed by Myron Hunt and H.C. Chambers. **Paul Ayers** sent us five maps related to Mt. Lowe including a rare profile valuation map called *Profile of Altadena Line and Mount Lowe Line Valuation Sections 74 & 74* which is several feet long, a copy of hand drawn map of Alpine Tavern and surrounding area (11 x 17), a copy of map of Alpine Tavern Buildings and Annex (8.5 x 11), a map depicting the proposed rearrangement of Alpine Tavern (8.5 x 14) and a detail of Rubio Incline and tracks leading to it, including slope, height and length measurements. The 2nd map includes a close up of the Rubio platform area. **Kathy Kobayashi** donated three

books on archive diversity: *Shades of L.A. Pictures from Ethnic Family Albums*, *Shades of L.A. A Los Angeles Family Album*, *Shades of California* all written or inspired by Carolyn Kozo Cole and Kathy Kobayashi. Lastly, in March, **Eric Mulfinger** donated City of Pasadena water resource maps from 1912 and 1919 (Western Altadena and Arroyo Seco).

In April, Eric Mulfinger donated a copy of Charles Seims' classic book *Mount Lowe, the Railway in the Clouds*.

In May AHS received four new donations: **Daria Topousis** purchased three postcards, two newspaper clippings and two copies of Eliot Junior High's *Elioteer* from 1949 and donated the items to AHS. **Paul Ayers** donated material regarding the Pine Canyon Mines adjacent to the Lone Tree Trail and the Camp Sierra Trail which ran from the vicinity of the Cobb Estate to the Camp Sierra sites, *Save the Altadena Trails* (public access lawsuits involving the



Owen Gravesite and La Vina), Mt. Lowe, rolled vellum plan of Echo Mt. 1913, and miscellaneous material about Altadena, Pasadena, and Southern California.

Steve Tice donated seven history books: *History of Los Angeles County, CA 1880*, *Ride the Big Red Cars*, *The Books of California*, *Autobiography of a Los Angeles Newspaperman*, *Natural Los Angeles*, *Old Mount Wilson Trail*, and *From Mexican days to the Gold Rush*, and an anonymous donor gifted AHS six photo postcards of Altadena circa 1949.

In June, Bryant Duffy donated a framed WWI Disabled Veterans of Altadena Charter Certificate and **Ben McGinty** donated a promotional item for Altadena Plumbing Services, Inc. – a thermometer in the shape of a frying pan. **Tom Davis** donated a map of Altadena, original issues of *The Altadenan* newspaper dated April 14, 1966 and three large plot maps of early Altadena and Pasadena – we are working to establish the dates of those plans now. **Paul Rollins** contributed six books to our library: *Pasadena*, *The Romance of the Ranchos*, *Valley of the Hahamogna*, *Pasadena Through Two Centuries*, *I Can Remember Early Pasadena*, *Jennie Hollingsworth Giddings*, *L.J. Rose of Sunny Slope, 1827-1899*, and *Lucky Baldwin, The Story of an Unconventional Success*.

In July we received five donations: **Susan Sundberg** sent in four color 4" x 6" photos of Owen Brown's original grave marker in its alleged original location in the 1970s. Ms. Sundberg recently came across the images while cleaning an old shed. **Eric Mulfinger** donated a few digital files

(excerpts from a book detailing an old railroad line (San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad) that once travelled up the Northern Arroyo Seco and into Millard Canyon just above JPL for mining

purposes. AHS is in the process of procuring the original book for our library. **Paul Ayers** gave AHS his well-deserved plaque of service recognition awarded by the LA County Board of Supervisors in 2003 for Paul's contributions to the Altadena Community Center's Planning Commission.

Deirdre Del Re gave us a signed copy of *Tuva or Bust!* *Richard Feynman's Last Journey* by Ralph Leighton, and **Marilyn Fullmer** from Arizona mailed us a 1950's Chamber of Commerce map brochure of Altadena and Pasadena areas.

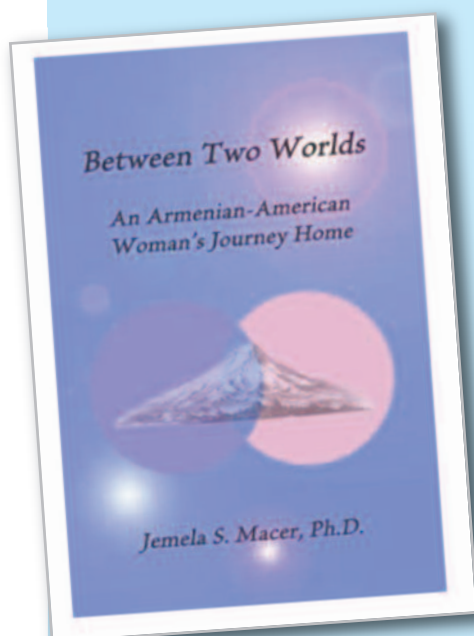
We look forward to sharing more donations with you in our next newsletter. In the meantime, we hope you will be inspired to clean out your attic, shed, closets, garages and basements and share any Altadena-related ephemera, documents, or artifacts you find with us. Lastly, while many of us now practice downsizing, decluttering or rehoming, please know we will happily preserve any Altadena-related treasures you may find in thrift stores, yard sales, etc. while out and about!



Mt. Lowe advertisement (in French) to reinforce the international appeal of our local attraction.

ALTADENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS AN ARMENIAN-AMERICAN WOMAN'S JOURNEY HOME

On Monday October 23, 2023, Dr. Jemela Macer, clinical psychologist, professor, consultant, and author will discuss her memoir, *Between Two Worlds, An Armenian-American Woman's Journey Home* at Altadena Historical Society's October program, Monday, October 23, at 7:00 p.m. at the Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive.



Southeastern Altadena and Northeastern Pasadena have long been home to Armenian families. Dr. Macer's talk will focus on growing into adulthood in Altadena in the 50s and 60s and her familial, cultural, and spiritual quest to integrate her Armenian ancestry with her American self.



A grandchild of four Armenian genocide survivors who were silent about the past, Dr. Macer, whose parents raised their children to be Americans, sought to learn more about her Armenian roots. The result is a moving memoir describing her travels and experiences, both physical and spiritual, inspiring us to take a closer look at our own relationships with our ancestral pasts.

For more information about the program, please email AHS at www.altadenahistoricalsociety.org or call us at 1-625-797-8016. Books will be available for purchase at the event.

7:00 p.m. Monday, October 23, 2023
in the Altadena Community Center
730 E. Altadena Drive



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

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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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