

# CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

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This issue of Chatsworth Past & Present features our own Chatsworth Historical Society and how it has evolved to become caretakers of the Hill-Palmer Historical Cottage, Gardens, and the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum, all located on what is called the Homestead Acre. The Acre is located at 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, at the west end of Devonshire within Chatsworth Park South.

It all started in 1963. In February of that year, the Pioneer Church was declared a Historical Monument by Los Angeles, based on paperwork submitted by Katherine Johnson, a member one of Chatsworth's pioneer families. This step postponed the pending demolition and provided the time needed to create an organization that would be responsible for the Church.

As the story goes... on April 17, 1963, according to the minutes of the first meeting, Virginia Watson, Katherine and RL Johnson, Art Honey, Evie Bowers, Keith Watts, and Charles and Eileen Janess all gathered at Katherine Johnson's house. The Historical Society was established that evening as a community organization to save the church and eventually use a portion of it as a museum to contain historical memorabilia. Charles Janess was elected president, Arthur Honey as treasurer and Sheila Watts became secretary.

Saving the pioneer church was the first order of business. A few months later Lila Schepler stepped in as president replacing Charles Janess due to illness. She led the group through the challenges of finding a home for the church at Oakwood Memorial Park. Virginia had already begun collecting Chatsworth photos from both the Williams family and Minnie Hill Palmer, storing items temporarily at her home and the Schepler's home as needed.

During this time, Virginia began to prepare slide presentations to give at Chatsworth Park Elementary school and wrote articles under the column "Out our Way" about Chatsworth and its history. Virginia was not the only one sharing Chatsworth History. Bill Schepler, who grew up as a boy in Chatsworth, created a slide show called "Grizzlies to Caterpillars" depicting the early Pioneer life and how it evolved into Caterpillar tractors bulldozing our area to make way for tract homes.

In January of 1965, the Church was moved from its site on Topanga Blvd to Oakwood Cemetery. The goal was to restore it to its original condition; however vandalism and the October 1967 fire scorching the building created additional problems. The Church sat on stilts, boarded up, as more funds were

raised for work to be done. They had managed to move the Church with donations of money and services for \$2,500, but by the time the restoration project was completed the total expenses were almost \$20,000.

At this point, the organization focused on raising funds to restore the church. They held garage sales and bake sales...anything they could do and slowly reached their goal. During this time the Historical Society met at Chatsworth High School or at members' homes, and would occasionally have meetings or functions at the church.

Minnie Hill-Palmer was active in the community during this time.. She had sold off the farm land and retained a Life Tenancy agreement with the Department of Parks and Recreation for the 1911 cottage and 1 1/3 acre of land surrounding it. In 1970, the golf course that surrounded her property closed. The Pro Shop building was offered to Minnie and it was moved on to her property. In 1978, after Minnie had moved to a retirement home, the Historical Society, with Minnie's approval, worked out an agreement with the Department of Recreation and Parks and became the conservator of the property. The Golf Pro Shop building eventually became the Chatsworth Museum.



Later in 1979 the Hill Palmer House was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The docent program was created by Lila Schepler to help educate volunteers so that public tours could begin in 1980. Local schools continue to arrange for tours for their classrooms to hear about the local history and visit the museum and cottage.

In 1988 the museum and grounds were the focal point of the Chatsworth Centennial event.



Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum sign with Historical Society Docents and Past Presidents, Lila Schepler, Virginia Watson and Lillian Schepler in 2007

In 1990, the society began hosting Pioneer Day, with the Garden Festival added in 1992. Bea Berman, Fundraising Chairman and Past President, has coordinated both fundraisers each year since they began.

Huell Howser visited Chatsworth and filmed the

Homestead Acre in 2003 for his California Gold television series. He continues to show the footage each year to promote our events.

In 2007, the Chatsworth Museum was renamed the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum. Virginia continues to give tours sharing her knowledge of Chatsworth's history.

The Historical Society is still going strong after 47 years. It just held its 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Pioneer Day in October, and will host the Garden Festival on May 1, 2011. Our next open house for the cottage and museum will be the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in January.

It's your community and your history....Come Join Us.  
*Chatsworth Historical Society - December 2010*