

History of the Chatsworth Historical Society

Huell Howser
interviewing
Virginia Watson
in 2003



Introduction

The Chatsworth Historical Society was founded on April 17th, 1963, to save the Pioneer Church.

This presentation will be divided into five parts:

- The first 10 years - saving the Pioneer Church
- The second 10 years - saving the Homestead Acre
- The third 10 years - maintaining and improving the Acre
- The last 31 years - continuing traditions, sharing our history at chatsworthhistory.com
- A 25 minute, 2003 video, "Huell Howser visits Chatsworth", featuring Virginia Watson and Linda and Andre van der Valk.

This presentation will be posted at our website, chatsworthhistory.com, Digital Archives, Presentations.

The First 10 years -- It all started in 1963 about saving the Pioneer Church...

- In February of that year, the Pioneer Church was declared a Historical Monument by Los Angeles, based on paperwork submitted by Katharine Johnson, a member of 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, Katharine and Kelly Johnson, Art Honey, Evie Bowers, Keith Watts, and Charles and Eileen Janess all gathered at Katharine 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 was Treasurer and Sheila Watts became Secretary.

The First 10 years -- It all started in 1963 about saving the Pioneer Church...

- 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.
- In January of 1965, the Church was moved from its site on Topanga Blvd to Oakwood Cemetery. [The Chatsworth Pioneer Church](#)
- It took another 6 years to raise funds for plumbing and electric, and to paint the church. In 1971 a “Concluding Stone Ceremony” was held to celebrate the placing of the cornerstone for the church.
- In 1976 the Oakwood Cemetery completes electric hookups and a road to the church, and there is a rededication ceremony as the restoration project is complete.
- In 1981 the church was leased to an Episcopal Church, and the church continues holding services to this day.

The 2nd 10 years – Saving the Homestead Acre

- In 1955, Minnie Hill Palmer sells off her farmland, and retains her house and 1.3 acres of land surrounding it. [Aqua Sierra & the Roy Rogers Sports Center](#)
- 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 1972, The LA Dept. of Recreation and Parks purchased Chatsworth Park South, and Minnie retained a Life Tenancy agreement for the 1911 cottage and 1.3 acres.
- 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.



Hill Palmer Cottage in 1979

- It was not until 1998 that the Caretaker's trailer was removed from the property by Recreation and Parks and the Acre finally looked as it does today.

The 3rd 10 years – Maintaining and Improving the Homestead Acre

- Cleaning and new furnishings were needed for Minnie's house which had been empty since she moved into a nursing home.
- Lawns and Gardens are taken care of by volunteers, members bring their own mowers to mow the lawns.
- New member Candy Craig volunteers to be “keeper of the Homestead Gardens”, her husband Dean, “kills all the weeds and cuts down the grass”.
- 1982 - First Rose Garden established.
- 1986 – A riding lawnmower is purchased for volunteer Dean Craig to use.
- Fundraisers include: Yard sales and Bake sales, hosting weddings and funerals at the Pioneer Church, used book sales at Topanga Plaza, weddings at the Acre.
- 1984 – First Garden/Rose Festival
- 1991 – First Pioneer Day

The 3rd 10 years – Celebrating Chatsworth's Centennial Birthday in 1988

- A Centennial Committee is formed to celebrate Chatsworth's 100th Birthday (chaired by Bea Berman).
- A quilt is made representing Chatsworth's History (spearheaded by Ruth Grant, Zena Thorpe and nine other local needlewomen).



The 3rd 10 years – Celebrating Chatsworth's Centennial Birthday in 1988

- A new Chatsworth song is written and performed at the celebration, presented by the Natural High Group led by Lester Smith Jr., composer.
- [Chatsworth Centennial Song Music Video](#)



The 3rd 10 years – Celebrating Chatsworth's Centennial Birthday in 1988

- The event is held at the Chatsworth Park South recreation center.
- The Mistress of Ceremonies is Catherine Mulholland, and Mayor Tom Bradley is in attendance.



The 3rd 10 years – Celebrating Chatsworth's Centennial Birthday in 1988

- Bea Berman, LA County Supervisor Michael Antonovich and Ca. State Assembly member Cathie Wright at the Time Capsule dedication at the Chatsworth Homestead Acre, to be opened in 2088.
- Porter Hudshon and Lillian Schepler were in charge of gathering items to be placed inside.
- Included are essays from school children, 1988 newspapers and other items that portray life in Chatsworth in 1988.



Preserving History was a top priority...

Pictures, Presentations, Articles and Books

- The group had already begun collecting Chatsworth photos from pioneer families including the Williams family and Minnie Hill Palmer.
- 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.
- Virginia Watson prepared a slide presentation to give at Chatsworth Park Elementary school.
- Sheila Watts, Katharine Johnson and Virginia wrote articles for local papers.
- Books authored by members about Chatsworth include “Chatsworth History” (Watson), “Chatsworth Park Elementary School” (Ioline Cleveland), “Our Pioneer Mother” (Johnson Family) and “Window into the Past” (Bill Schepler), “A Short Horse is Soon Curried” (Bob Turner), “Quiet on the Set” by Bob Sherman.

Museum Archives and Collections

- Frank Schepler was the “Director of Photography” creating slides of over 300 photos to use in slide shows.
- These photos and more are being digitized and added to our collection.
- Collections of materials continue to be donated for display and reference by current and former residents.
- Oral Histories of our residents are being recorded and preserved.
- Archiving methods for storage continue to improve.



The last 31 years –

- Continuing traditions of two fundraisers each year, the Garden Festival on the last Sunday in April, and Pioneer Day the first Sunday in October.
- Sharing our History at chatsworthhistory.com, Digital Archives
 - 157 YouTube videos at [chatsworthhistory1](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m1m), with the most popular being a 1957 Highway Patrol Episode with Clint Eastwood, with over 1 million views.
 - 50 Powerpoint [Presentations](#) related to Chatsworth History
 - Our almost complete collection of [Smoke Signal](#) Newsletters, from 1966 to current.
 - Other historic Publications including the [Chatsworth Grapevine](#), [Owensmouth Gazette](#), and [Chatsworth History Articles](#)

CHS Adventures – Fundraising

- Saving the Church and getting it back in shape took lots of fundraising and over the first 20 years a variety of methods were used. The most successful at that time were the Spring and Fall Yard Sales run by Ioline Cleveland and the annual Book Sale at Topanga Plaza run by Lillian Schepler.
- Once the Historical Society acquired the Acre, then Candy Craig began the idea of a Rose Festival in the Spring of 1982 but it was only about roses. Eventually that event evolved by 1993 to the Garden Festival we have now, replacing the Yard sales.



A happy crew ready to sell you one of the many items donated for the Yard Sale.

- In 1993 you could also become a member of the Chatsworth Museum Council and receive a medallion worthy of framing. The \$100 membership funds were specified for improving the museum.

CHS Adventures – Fundraising

- Pioneer Day evolved based on the 100 year celebration of the Homestead Acre in 1986 demonstrating spinning, quilting and more.
- Following the 1986 event, Weddings were held at the Acre and could also be held at the Pioneer Church, both supervised by the Chatsworth Historical Society. However the volunteers were soon burned out from what was a very busy schedule every weekend.
- In 1991 they tried the Pioneer Day idea and it became an annual event. The Chili Cook-off was added to it in 1995.



CHS Adventures – Parades

1965 - A community group at heart, it didn't take long for the Historical Society to participate in the Chatsworth Parade letting everyone know their accomplishment of saving the Pioneer Church.

Founder Charles Janess is pulling the float.



CHS Adventures – Parades

In **1966** this float says "Pioneering with Books" the book was made with chicken wire stuffed with tissue paper.

Art Honey is standing, Minnie Hill Palmer is seated.



CHS Adventures – Parades

In **1968** Minnie Hill Palmer was an honored guest in the Parade.



CHS Adventures – Parades

In **1982**, The Docent program was in full swing and participated on this float.

Includes: Tricia Plucknett, Marion Hyland, Betty and Jim Summers

Note that people are wearing Santa hats. Previous Chatsworth Parades were held in July, and then were held in December....



CHS Adventures – Parades

In **1982**, The Docent program was in full swing and participated on this float.

Although you can't see her face, the lady in green is Virginia Watson



CHS Adventures – Parades

In **1986**, this float celebrated 100 years of the Acre

Featured on the float are Candy Craig, Paul Gossett and Matt Mitchell

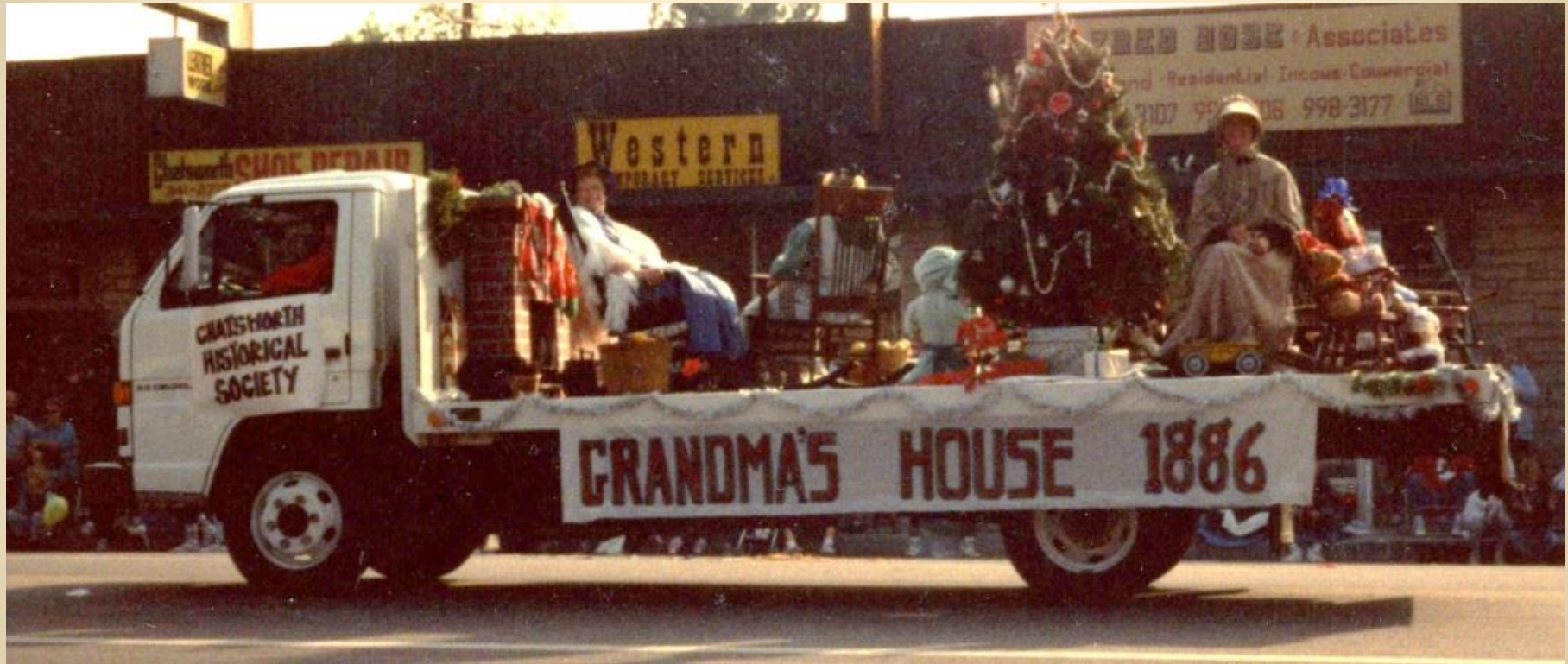


CHS Adventures – Parades

1987 - Riding in the buggy are Millie Goff, Marion Hyland, Betty Summers and Ramon Avila



CHS Adventures – Parades



1989 - Included docents Betty Summers and Sheila Watts

CHS Adventures – Parades

In 1990, Bea Berman made arrangements for the Wells Fargo Stagecoach to represent the Society with Lila and Bill Schepler riding inside, celebrating their 50th wedding Anniversary at the parade.



CHS Adventures – Parades

1998 Keith Watts and John Thorpe



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2000 Zena and John Thorpe on a bicycle built for two...



The Chatsworth Historical Society 61 Years of History - 1963-2024

25

CHS Adventures – Parades

2001 - To the right Bea Berman and Elaine Campbell showing the historic flat iron



CHS Adventures – Parades

2005 – Military Uniforms on Display.

Virginia Watson, Betty Summers,
Elaine Campbell, Ray and Ann Vincent



CHS Adventures – Parades

2006 - Gary Bercow, Jelena Csanyi, Linda van der Valk, and a variety of Grandchildren

With Roy Rogers poster showing Roy and Dale riding in the parade.



CHS Adventures – Parades

2009 - Andre van der Valk and his Army Jeep, riding with a variety of grandchildren



CHS in the 2009 parade

CHS Adventures – Parades

2011 – Connie
Ager in an
antique car



5/21/2024

CHS Adventures – Parades

2013 – Carol & Mike Lucas in their antique car



Presidents during the years.....

		Terms
Charles Janess	1963-64	1
Lila Schepler	1964-65, 72-74, 75-76, 86-87	5
Ebert Chatham	1965-66	1
Garvin Aulepp	1966-68	2
Lillian Schepler	1968-70, 76-78	4
Virginia Watson	1970-72, 78-79, 87-88, 96-97	5
Dr. Ruth Boak	1974-75	1
Jane Matthews	1979-80, 88-89	2
Sheila Watts	1980-82, 90-91, 94-96	5
Ioline Cleveland	1982-1986	4
Zena Thorpe	1991-93	2
Bea Berman	1993-94	1
John Thorpe	1997-2000	3
Linda & Andre van der Valk	2000-present	24

And along the way – Creating/Supporting a few Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments.....

- 1963 – (#14) The Pioneer Church
- 1967 – (#49) Olive Trees on Lassen
- 1972 – (#92) The Stagecoach Trail
- 1974 – (#132) Stoney Point Outcroppings
- 1974 – (#133) Minnie Hill Palmer House
- 1975 – (#141) Chatsworth Reservoir Kiln Site
- 1997 – (#645) Harvester Farms
- 2003 – (#750) The Munch Box
- 2019 – (#1177) The Apeta Momonga Mission Trail



How can you help, or to borrow a 1973 theme from Lila Schepler, “If it’s to BE, it HAS to be ME”



- Volunteer at our Wednesday morning meetings:
 - In the Garden helping with Weeds and Roses, and maybe pruning some trees.
 - Our Digital Archiving project, which includes scanning our photos and collections.
- Welcome Guests at our Open House, the 1st Sunday of each month from 1 to 4.
- Help support our two big fundraisers, the Garden Festival and Pioneer Day. We can always use help the Saturday before setting up (Pioneer Day), Sunday morning before the events, and Sunday afternoon during tear down.

Send us an email at chatsworthhistory@gmail.com and let us know your interests!



In 2019, Virginia Watson passed away at the age of 97.

Councilman Smith dedicated the roadway going to the acre and the recreation center "Virginia Watson Way"

A Virginia Watson History/Tribute is available in our [April 2019 Smoke Signal](#)

In 2007, the Historical Society museum was renamed "The Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum"

Up Next - a 25 minute
2003 Huell Howser Episode

"Visiting with Huell Howser :
Chatsworth"

Featuring
Virginia Watson
Linda and Andre van der Valk

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The
Ralph M. Parsons
Foundation

Sources/Acknowledgements

- Various archived materials at the Chatsworth Historical Society, most notably the “Smoke Signal” Newsletters published over the years by the Chatsworth Historical Society.

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