

WHITTIER GAZETTE



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WHITTIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY, WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA

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ONCE UPON A TIME . .

. or so the old story goes, be it fact or myth, Pio Pico and his young wife were looking for a place to build their permanent home. Knowing which way they were going one day for a ride, he told her, "Where we stop for lunch, there we will build our home." And there it stands today on the banks of the San Gabriel.

Forty years later, on the slope above and east of Pico's home stood three of the disciples of William Penn, seeking a place in the new west for a Quaker colony. And they repeated the words Pico had said before them, "There we build our home." And so began Whittier.

More and more people could see the promise of this fine area so that by 1902 Whittier had doubled her population in just two years, from one thousand five hundred and sixty to three thousand. In the same time bank deposits had increased from \$90,000 to \$275,000. In the previous six months more than \$90,000 had been invested in buildings; a \$12,000 church, two \$12,000 school buildings, a \$15,000 Odd Fellows Hall and scores of residences.

A fire department had been organized by that time and the building erected and ample equipment secured. The city was lighted with electricity. A complete system of interurban electric railway was assured at an early date; a new \$25,000 High School building within a year, a City Hall and a dozen miles of cement sidewalks were planned for the near future. But what were the causes of all this development?

The answer was not hard to find. Whittier was not merely a summer or winter resort; not a spot that flourished on the support of tourists. There was no city of its size in the world which had a greater wealth-producing territory tributary to it. The

10,000 acres of orchard which lay in a great crescent at its feet would alone assure permanent prosperity.

It was very generally granted that the San Gabriel Valley district, which adjoined the City of Whittier, was the finest English walnut region in California. The products of 1902 reached 50,000 sacks, a valuation of \$450,000. Walnut growers were strongly associated for mutual protection, and so able was the management that the district practically controlled the price in America.

It was also a significant fact that the first car of California oranges shipped out that year came from Whittier. The year before 200 carloads of oranges and 150 of lemons were shipped, and the output was going up by 50 and 100 cars a year. Three leading companies alone disbursed \$135,000 to growers of citrus fruit in that year. Ten acres of ten year old citrus or walnut trees could make a good living, yielding an annual income of \$2,000 or \$3,000.

There are only two natural reasons for Southern California's failing to equal the tropics in luxuriant production. The first is the cold winds, which sometimes in December and January blow from the snow caps of the Sierras and blight orchard and garden. But again Nature has been kind to Whittier and reared up the Puente hills to ward off the cold. The almost unexampled temperature of January 3, 1902, which wrought severe damage in so many localities, left the citrus growths of the Whittier foothills untouched. There is a thermal or frostless belt where the slope of the plain lies up against the hills, below the cold of the rarified heights and above the valley floors which by natural laws of ventilation drain the cold atmosphere to the lower levels. So the Whittier orchards to that time had never known the touch of frost. Amid the walnut and citrus groves flourished peaches and apricots and pears and apples and plums. Underneath the spreading branches were gardens which made the

housekeeper's task easy - tomatoes, peas, beans and strawberries, even in January; lettuce and radishes fresh every day in the year - and flowers! Roses, carnations, lilies, English violets and golden poppies. With such beauty and fragrance delighting the senses, with such delicacies from his own garden, with such orchards, minting their own gold, truly the rancher would say, "There I will build my home."

The other reason for dissatisfaction with some of Southern California was its water - what it had and what it hadn't. A journey through much of the State was an excellent commentary on Old Testament digging of wells and bitter waters. But this section was especially fortunate in its water supply, both for domestic and for irrigation purposes. The city owned its own system, purchased at a cost of \$45,000, and then greatly improved and extended. In the very dooryard of the old Pico mansion were located deep wells, tapping the exhaustless water-bearing strata which the Rio San Gabriel had been laying down for ages. Pure, sparkling, cold water was drawn from deep wells and carried through pipes and covered reservoir in ample amount for field and city. But, in addition to the splendid city system, to many local companies and to the great network of the San Gabriel River districts, there was a reorganization of the East Whittier system, a co-operative association with its flowing wells and pumping plants near El Monte, its twelve miles of cement conduits with a capacity of 1500 miner's inches and laterals built to eight thousand acres in the beautiful La Habra Valley, lying in the frostless foothill belt to the east, and lacking before that time nothing but water. The promoters of that system had had perhaps wider experience than any two men to be found on the Pacific Coast, experience on the great Imperial tract, in Australia and in other places (the Chaffey's). They knew just what had to be done, what could be done, and they knew how to do it. As a result, a perpetual and ample water supply was assured at cost price to the settler to whom the land was being sold, for, when the system was complete, the men who constructed it, having made a profit, stepped out, leaving the ownership in the hands of the people. With this added area set to walnuts and oranges, there was tributary to Whittier the finest fruit tract in California or in the world.

But the Puente hills were still not satisfied with the blessings they had showered upon their adopted child, the "Foothill City". In 1898 they whispered the secret of another source of wealth hidden in their bosom. The oil discovered there was of such high

quality and was found in such abundance that the field was considered one of the best in the state, and the product found ready sale, when that of many wells was a drug on the market. Though the field was scarcely entered, the monthly output in 1903 had reached 60,000 barrels. As the shallow wells of the first drilling were being deepened to 2200 feet, still greater reservoirs of still better oil were being tapped, and the store was shown to be practically exhaustless. Local capital had received highly remunerative returns from the oil industry, but the greatest benefit to the community was the high wages, an average of \$4.50 per day to the army of workmen demanded by its rapid development.

Another item in the catalogue of Nature's gifts might be recorded. It takes a startling revelation sometimes to make us realize our blessings. Such a disclosure came in 1901 to some parties drilling for water on the Meyers ranch, two miles south of Whittier, when the drill was suddenly hurled from the well, followed by sand and water and rocks, thrown to the height of two hundred feet, a phenomenon lasting for several days. Through the wreck of the well natural gas escaped in such quantity that a flame ten feet in height was seen blazing day and night for three years. A local company was formed to develop this new product, a high grade fuel and illuminant, and experts said the formation indicated a body of it sufficient to supply all Southern California. As Whittier stretched out her hands filled with such rare opportunities and advantages. Labor and Capital responded in an ever-increasing chorus, "There we will build our home."

America is the home of homes, and California is pre-eminently the home spot of the continent. It means much to the ideal home life that children may play in the open air every day in the year; that sun and breeze and sea and mountains unite in balm and invigoration. To these natural advantages Whittier had added other rare inducements to the homeseeker. There were no saloons in its borders. There were nine church edifices representing the leading denominations in 1904, and there were few vacant pews. A stranger remarked, "Why even the men go to church in Whittier."

The interest of the people of Whittier in education and the difficulty of furnishing facilities to keep pace with that interest was shown in the two commodious grammar schools just completed; in the bonds having been passed for a magnificent new home for the High School which had grown since its inception; in the royal way Whittier College had

been supported and built up until it afforded opportunities for high education unexcelled by any like institution. With these new public school facilities and the great development which was made possible to the college by liberal endowment, in a situation so conducive to mental effort, certainly Whittier promised well to become an educational center. For it was already a cultured people drawn from the best sections of the East; a culture attested by the demand for the wide use of the public library; by the liberal patronage of lecture courses; by interest in

the University Extension movement. The refined progressive home-seeker who had in mind the best interests of his children might well have chosen a spot within the sound of Whittier's church and school bells and say, "There we will build our home."

Whoever you are, could you have found a more attractive place to build your home?

Excerpts from a
Board of Trade Pamphlet
WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA
1904



WHAT'S HAPPENING

I Pledge

The funds for closing the museum property escrow simply must be in by February. If you haven't sent in your donation or pledge yet - get off your checkbook.

Regardless of the excellent articles in the News, there are far too many people in our community who don't know what is going on. We never really speak of duties in belonging to our Society. But now, today, you have one. Enclosed is another pledge card. Consider it your job to get it to a neighbor or friend, tell them our goal and **get that donation**.

The monies collected during this fund drive will be returned if we do not reach the needed \$250,000. **You** can't let this happen! Get crackin'.

Winter Meeting

The regular January meeting of the Historical Society will feature Dr. Shumway of Fullerton who will have all kinds of information to give us about Oral History. This is an area of research in which we have all been and are constantly involved. We have all listened to the old family stories since we were knee high - and still do. Come and bring a friend to learn how we can preserve these memories. A special flyer will give you the pertinent information, but hold open the date of January 22.

This will also be election meeting. The nominating committee was composed of Earl Myer, chairman, and Virginia Schallenberger, Board Member, with Jan Lopez, Arnie Collins and Viola Hall, members appointed at large. They have presented these nominees for the four seats to be vacated on the Board: Robert Bates, Virginia Boles, Arnold Collins and Francine Rippey. Nominations will be accepted from the floor with the permission of the person nominated.

Look Look, the Book

The sales of **Founders and Friends** have been moving right along, but could be better. Any member is welcome to check out a group of copies to carry off and sell at a club meeting or around the neighborhood. Check with Phyllis. Copies are still available at UCB-Village, Quaker-Village, Chamber of Commerce, and the Pico Mansion.

Mini-conference

The winter meeting of the Los Angeles County Associated Societies will be held in Griffith Park on Saturday, Jan. 17th. It will include a tour of the park and zoo and a ride on a steam engine. Anyone interested in a \$7 day filled with fun and information, contact Radford or Rummel.



History is today . . .

Historical Historical Tour

What a beautiful day October 19 turned out to be. It was just perfect for our Fall Meeting -- which was a perfect meeting. There is no way we can really thank those who opened their homes to us. Certainly it was a privileged opportunity. It was an eye opener, too, to go from Tom Bryant's Victorian Baldwin House still in the process of being restored to spacious California bungalow that was the home of the Johnsons and Harrisons and is now being watched over by Mr. and Mrs. Barry Kerns. Then to see the Strong House that is over a hundred years old in its oldest section and so elegantly furnished by Mr. and Mrs. Collins and the popular farmhouse style of the East Whittier ranchers embodied in the Flecher House of the Allingtons - all pointing out what a variety of architectural styles are to be found in our town.

It was a lovely finish for the day to be serenaded by Trudy Hartman on the accordian at the Bailey House while we nibbled the cookies and ice cream served by Dr. Carlos and Connie Bailey and Randy and Harriet Twycross. Frances Pedretti, the Bailey Docent chairman, had twelve of their committee helping show the house. The historic tour of the Strong house was being given by the Pico Docents.

Heritage Ball

The Heritage Ball - a fund raiser for the Whittier Museum - was a great success. Those who attended were generous in their praise of a grand evening with Les Brown and his Band of Reknown.

To all those who helped during the planning stage and those who helped on the big night (November 14), we extend our sincere appreciation. Space does not permit us to list all the names.

Doris Pawlick, manager of Whittwood, and Bonnie Meyers who was in charge of publicity, were great to work with. A special thanks to John Lusk

who made it all happen. Lusk Commercial Properties paid for the band, security, advertising and many other items and provided the facilities.

Among the door prizes was a \$250 gift certificate from JC Penney and a trip for two to Las Vegas donated by World Travel, Whittier. Our thanks, too, to all the merchants in the Whittwood Mall for their support of the event.

When Earl Myer added up the income and subtracted the expenses, he was pleased (as were we all) to present the Museum Fund with a check for \$7000.

Now, what shall we plan for next year?

Nadine and Virginia
Co-chairmen

New Board Member

Barry Kerns has been appointed to the unexpired term as Board Member vacated by Walter Wood. As usual, no Board member goes without a special assignment, as an officer or in charge of a regular committee or at a job that is deemed necessary currently by the board. Barry had already begun investigating the possibility of creating a Heritage Square around Central Park. He is now officially working toward this end as the representative of our Society. This may be just the kind of project that you have been looking for to do your part in our group. Barry certainly could use some help in researching information and snipping away at all the red tape involved in establishing such an entity.

Mr. K. has already met with the City Planning Commission and was instrumental in delaying a proposed rezoning of that area. The Commissioners have shown an interest in preserving what still remains and even improving the park itself with a Gazebo and a band shell. Sounds pretty exciting!

If you are looking for Barry to offer him a hand, he's the gent you find at 6554 Friends, across from the park in the Johnson-Harrison home.

Sadness

Our president, Phyllis Pearce, lost her mother in early December. There is never anything anyone can really do at a time like this. Perhaps, as she reads this, she will know that over three hundred others will be reading it, also, and sharing her pain and loss in their hearts and minds.

Artifacts

Museum or not, we are still receiving lovely additions to our historic collections. There are now two wedding dresses from the Weeks family -one from 1880 and one from 1884. Also Mrs. Schwally has passed along three old dolls.

After the Fashion Show it was concluded that the clothing in the collection needed a bit of attention. Mending was done and articles are now stored more securely, some on special hangers given by the Broadway Stores.

Pico Reports

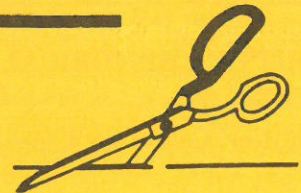
The meeting at the Rio Hondo College in November was well attended by Pico Docents along with a few people from the surrounding communities. The members of the General Planning Unit for the State Park solicited suggestions from

everyone as to what they would like to see happen at the park. The Docents have since prepared a detailed report pointing out immediate needs and offering ideas for further improvements at future times. They hope to keep in continued correspondence with the planners as this project progresses.

The money collected from the sale of the re-issuance of the Martin Cole book on Pico and the Mansion has finally been put to use. It was the wish of Mr. Cole and the members of the Pio Pico Mansion Society that the proceeds be used for some permanent addition to the Mansion. An Horno -outdoor oven- has now been built neer the kitchen door and curtains have been put up in the livingroom. The livingroom now looks so much more gracious. And you can expect fresh baked bread at the next Fiesta.

Want Ad

The Gazette is looking for information about the Avocado Show that used to be an annual event in this town. With the size of the crop we have this year, what better time to revive these old memories. Call with your thoughts, write down what you remember or send along copies of any of the old brochures or articles. The phone number is on the back or the P.O. Box will do.



WHITTIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY Membership Application

Name Home Telephone

Address Business Telephone

If you would like to serve on a committee, please indicate in which area(s)

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$ Please circle type of membership you wish:

Single - \$5, Family - \$7.50, Institutional - \$25,
Sustaining - \$50, Individual Life - \$100, Husband &
Husband & Wife Life - \$175

.....
Signature

Mail this application with your check to the Whittier Historical Society, PO Box 561, Whittier, CA 90607.

**WHITTIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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EDITOR: Mary Ann Rummel 696-7850

Membership in the Whittier Historical Society is open to persons interested in history and future of the Whittier area. Membership year is from March 1 - February 28. Dues are \$5 for individual membership - \$7.50 for family membership - \$25 for institutional membership - \$50 for sustaining membership - \$100 for individual life membership - \$175 for husband and wife life membership.

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