



Summer 2008

Cliff Numark,
Editor

TORRANCE HISTORIAN

Newsletter of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum

The Library: Treasured Archive

Librarian Michael George Discovers the First Book

One day an old ledger book appeared on my chair. This was nothing less than the “holy grail” of Torrance Library history, Isabel Henderson’s original catalog of books.

There, in the precise handwriting of a 19th century English teacher, stamped with what must be the first “Torrance Public Library” stamp, were recorded the first 300 of what would become 550,000 items that form the collection of the Torrance Public Library today.

In 1913, the “city” of Torrance was only a year old



and consisted of a little more than a few industrial plants, a depot and a couple of blocks of worker housing. The grand idea of the city was to be a comfortable place for workers and their families to live and play just blocks from their jobs. Torrance was the work-live “Playa Vista” of the early 1900s.

Isabel Henderson, a cousin of Jared Sydney Torrance, had come out west at the invitation of her wealthy relative. At the time, “Southern California air” was touted as “tonic for the nerves” according to Dr. D.

(The Library, Continued on page 2)

Upcoming Events

FREE Walking Tours of Old Torrance – 1:30 – 3 p.m.,
July 27, Aug. 24,
Sept. 28, Oct. 26

Rock Around the Block –
July 17, 5 – 8 p.m. 1950s FREE
FUN, FAMILY EVENT

Original Fall Historic Home Tour
2008 – Oct. 11 & 12,
11 am – 4 p.m. Price = \$18

For more info, please visit
TorranceHistoricalSociety.org
and get details for our events!

PRESIDENT’S COLUMN: DEBBIE HAYS

End of a Great Tenure

For the past four years, it has been my privilege, pleasure, and honor to serve as President. History is something I love (especially when it’s in your own backyard), and it’s with love that I have done my “job.”

Our Museum wouldn’t even be on the map, if it weren’t for our team of dedicated volunteers, who give the gift of their time. The Museum is not only rich in history, but community spirit, as well.

Over the past four years, we

covered a lot of territory — from Western Movie Night, to Tassel Twirlers and alligators, to third graders touring Torrance, and Home Town Heroes!

Other highlights include . . .

- Teaming with the City to create a voluntary set of Architectural Guidelines for Old Torrance; signage to recognize the original boundaries of the City; and a plan to outline Historic Preservation.

(President’s Column, Continued on page 4)

Sammy's Sponsors THS Fundraiser

The Torrance Historical Society wants to extend a special thanks to Sammy's Woodfired Pizza, especially Sami Ladeki, owner, for his *generous* donation of "free pizza" coupons for our annual membership drive.

We offered these to the first 50 Torrance Historical Society Members who renewed their annual dues in February. Our members responded enthusiastically, and 50 memberships were renewed within *two days* of the mailing

of our membership renewal letter (some folks hand-delivered their dues)!

Additional "free pizza" coupons were used as an incentive for others to join our organization — *it worked!* A special thanks also goes to Barbara Ramsey-Duke for being our wonderful liaison! Thanks again to Sami and Barbara — we know that our membership will reward the generosity of the folks at Sammy's Woodfired Pizza with their patronage.



(The Library, Continued from page 1)

H. Calder of the Utah State Insane Institutions. Mrs. Henderson, well educated widow of an eastern doctor, liked what she saw in the budding community and, perhaps, the reasonable price for a bungalow provided by the backers of the Dominguez Land Company.

Mrs. Henderson was, "An ardent individualist, a keen observer of the times, an astute world traveler, Mrs. Henderson gave unsparingly of her talents to broaden Torrance people's views..." (address from the dedication of the Post Library, 1937).

Aside from establishing the library, Mrs. Henderson was an organizer of the Red Cross in WWI, and a charter member of the Torrance Woman's Club and Torrance Memorial Hospital.

Jared Sidney Torrance had great plans for his model community. The layout was started by none other than Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. for the princely sum of \$10,000. Draconian home owner's covenants were installed in deeds to assure community standards. (Only Caucasians could own property except for the "foreign quarter", no poultry in the front yard, the Dominguez Land Company could take your land if you violated the building codes and forget about buying a drink in the city.)

Finally, an imposing \$30,000 library was to be built for the betterment and amusement of the community. Bad timing, social problems and other issues stopped much of the ambitious building program.

But the community did not have to wait for the establishment of the Torrance Public Library. Jared Torrance and other investors in the Dominguez Land Company donated 300 books to establish the library in

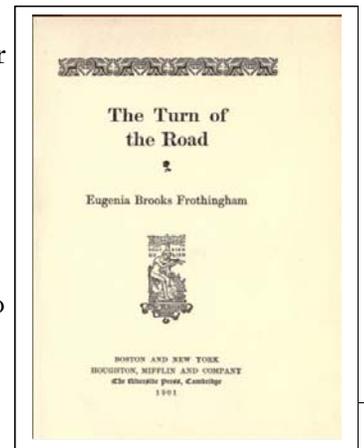
Isabel Henderson's parlor on Gramercy. The next year the recently established Los Angeles County Library gobbled up the Torrance Library and hired Mrs. Henderson as its Librarian.

I was now looking at the first books ever given to the library. I have known this catalog existed but thought it in an archive of the County library system.

Evidently it was passed down from head librarian to head librarian, Isabel Henderson to her daughter and successor, Dorothy Jamison to Russell West, first City Librarian, to James Buckley and now to Paula Wiener, like a sacred tome, which indeed it is.

At last, the mystery of what the first book in the library could be solved. Right under the scarlet "Torrance Public Library Stamp, was a book I thought was titled "Lure of the Road" published in 1901. Checking the antique book shops, old library catalogs, book reviews of the time and even the Library of Congress, I could not find a book with that title published at the date given.

It wasn't until I took a digital image of the page and blew it up did I find that the book was "Turn of the Road", by Eugenie Brook Frothingham. The "Turn of the Road" is "the story of a singer, of her absorption in her art, and of the strong willed self reliant man who would marry her..." Truly, the Torrance Public Library was founded on the Classics.



Japanese-Americans in Torrance

Every week we receive questions from people who visit our Web Site. Sometimes we have the answers at our fingertips, and others require further research. Recently, we were asked, "I have read the city's website, and other websites, but they do not explain why there is a large concentration of Japanese Americans in Torrance."

We believed the reason to be farming. To be sure, we contacted former California State Assemblymember, George Nakano, to see if he could better answer the question.

Mr. Nakano replied . . . "You are correct. There had been many Japanese American farmers, not only in Torrance, but in the surrounding communities in the South Bay such as Gardena, Rancho Dominguez, Compton, Redondo Beach and Palos Verdes. Many of the farmers were here back in the 1920s, long before Carson, and the cities in Palos Verdes peninsula became incorporated.

The Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute, which was built in 1924, served as a community center

for the entire South Bay area. There had to be a significant Japanese American population in order to build a community center since it was funded through personal donations.

As you probably know, there were about 3,000 Japanese Americans living on Terminal Island before WWII, mostly fishermen. More recently, Japanese Americans have been moving out of Gardena and moving to Torrance, Palos Verdes and Orange County."

To learn more about Japanese Americans, we invited Wesley, the gentleman who asked the question, to visit our Museum, and see our small, but mighty, exhibit entitled . . . *"That's just the way it was,"* Jerome, Arkansas.

This display features photos, documents and a scale replica of a camp barrack similar to those in which over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were relocated. Wesley did visit our Museum, and stayed for a couple of hours learning more about Torrance history.

TORRANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD WWW.TORRANCEHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

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History – Just a Click Away

The Torrance Historical Society presented the City of Torrance with a \$20,000 check to contribute to the digitization of newspapers and directories from the past. This is an important part of preserving Torrance History!

5-4-3-2-1 . . . Blast Off!

In January, the Museum was contacted by Lauren Orchowski, a photographer working on a long term project to document the rocketship playgrounds throughout the United States, which feature play structures much like the one in Los Arboles Park / "Rocketship Park" -- 5101 Calle de Ricardo, Torrance.

In conjunction with documenting these rapidly disappearing environments, Lauren has also been in search of the company that produced this playground equipment. For the past three years, she has been unable to locate any evidence or information as to who originally manufactured the rocketship structures.

Within 30 minutes of contacting the Torrance Historical Society (via our Web Site), we were able to provide Lauren with not only the name of the manufacturer, but also the model number, and "name" of the rocketship (Moon Rocket) -- all thanks to our wonderful staff at the Community Services Dept. (Parks & Rec).

To date, Lauren has traveled over 21,000 miles documenting other "Rocketship" parks, and noted, "Your rocket, at this particular park, is the only one which I have come across that has been brought up to current safety codes, rededicated, and valued by the community as an important piece of history."

The Torrance Historical Society recognized the significance of the rocket at "Rocketship Park", and placed a bronze landmark plaque there in 1992.



(President's Column, Continued from page 1)

- Attempting to explore and understand the effects of Executive order 9066 on the Japanese American community with our "That's Just the Way it Was - Jerome, Arkansas" exhibit.
- Expanding programming — reaching to a broad audience of interest — from the young, to the young at heart
- Hand delivering nearly 2000, 2007 calendars to all third graders in the Torrance Unified School District
- Hoppin', boppin' and rockin' around the block with our 1950s *Rock Around the Block* event to bring new people into our Museum
- Funding for the Digitization Project of the City directories, and both the *Torrance Herald* and the *Peninsula Press* — newspapers dedicated to the Torrance area, seen to fruition. These pages of history will be mounted on the Torrance Library's web site -- making the history of our City available to all who have an interest without damaging the original resources.
- Acquisition of a collection of Louis Zamperini memorabilia

In closing, I'd like to quote Albert Schweitzer, "*I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.*" So, it's with a happy heart that I have served four years as President.



**The 1960s, Reggie and an Airshow!
Events Celebrate Torrance History**

The Torrance Historical Society celebrated events throughout the spring, including Torrance in the 1960s, led by Michael George; a session and story-book on the famous South Bay alligator, Reggie, and the history of Torrance in flight.

All events were well-attended by Torrance Historical Society members and community members.

**Honored In A
Celebration of
Community**

On Friday, April 25th, the Torrance Historical Society was honored with a Proclamation at a "Celebration of Community" luncheon hosted by the Kiwanis Club of Torrance in partnership with the Lomita-Torrance Airport Rotary Club.

At this first annual event, Mayor Frank Scotto recognized Service and Non-Profit Organizations in the South Bay for their incredible work to answer the needs challenging our community, and communities around the world.

Over 40 other organizations were also recognized as the backbone of our community — the Torrance Historical Society is proud to be one of them.



Good Bye to Wonderful Board Members!

We wish a fond farewell to Jamie Ruth Watson, 3rd VP; Gene Hassan, Secretary; and Lynda Kraemer, Museum Volunteer Chair who retired from their board service this June. We thank them for their great service to the Torrance Historical Society & Museum.

- The First Book
- Sammy's Fundraiser!
- The History of Japanese-Americans in Torrance
- Rocketship Park
- Torrance Council celebrates Project on Digitization

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Return Services Requested

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The Torrance
 Historian

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THE HISTORY OF THE TORRANCE CITY MANAGER



Torrance is the sixth largest city in Los Angeles County and the 34th largest in the state of California.

What puts Torrance on the map, is a team of special City employees who make Torrance a place people call home. It takes someone with a keen sense of leadership and vision to oversee the

day-to-day activities of our City.

That person is LeRoy J. Jackson, Torrance City Manger.

Mr. Jackson has worked for the City of Torrance for 41 years, and has been the City Manager for 25.

The City Manager is appointed by the City Council, and is responsible for administering policies, managing the efforts of City departments and enforcing budget controls. All department heads re-

port to the City Manager except for the City Clerk, City Treasurer, and the City Attorney.

Mr. Jackson is only the fourth City Manager — George Stevens served almost 14 years and Edward J. Ferraro almost 20 — Wade Peoples served a short tenure. Each man made his mark on Torrance, and Mr. Jackson continues to do so. For a quarter of a century, he has been making his own history!

Torrance Historical Society & Museum Membership Form

Name _____ Address _____

Hm Phone (____) ____ - _____ Email _____

Adult – \$20 Family – \$30 Youth (<18) - \$10 Senior (65+) - \$15

Business/Organization – \$50 Individual Life Membership – \$350

Please mail this form with your check made out to "Torrance Historical Society, **1345 Post Avenue Torrance, CA 90501**