

# Torrance Historian

Published for members, this newsletter is dedicated to the support & preservation of Torrance History – *share the history with your family & friends!*

January 1998  
Debbie Hays, Editor

## THS Board Tours Home of J. Sydney Torrance

It was a gray and rainy day when 30 of us boarded a bus bound for Pasadena on Sunday, November 30th. With great excitement and anticipation, the



*The home where J. Sydney Torrance once resided.  
Pasadena, CA*

group of Torrance Historical Society (THS) board members, spouses and city officials ventured off to tour the house where J. Sydney Torrance, founder of Torrance, once lived and died.

This rare opportunity began to formalize after Torrance City Councilwoman, Maureen O'Donnell, read John Bogert's article in the Daily Breeze which explained that this historic mansion was up for sale and might someday be in danger of having the proposed 710 freeway extension as its neighbor.

Maureen contacted Tony Kriss, THS President, to see if he could arrange a tour before this historic

monument was sold. Tony, in turn, was able to organize a private tour with the owners — Mr. & Mrs. Qvale. Torrance CitiCable was there to record the event on film.

Our gracious hosts, Ragnar Qvale, his wife, Molly and their youngest son, Eric, each took a group of 10 and played the role of tour guide.

It was with wide-eyed curiosity that we all oohed and awed our way through the 12 bedroom, 13,393 square foot 1904 Tudor "house".

The Qvale's were in the midst of restoring this home to its original grandeur — a monumental task. They replaced the roof, patched and painted walls back to their original color, and upgraded the electrical — for starters. The claw foot tubs, glass door knobs, hardwood floors, marble sinks and light fixtures remain original!

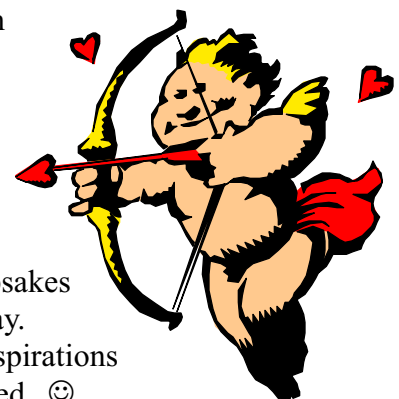
*continued on page 2*

## Current Museum Exhibits

### Tokens of Love & Affection

Stop by the Museum during the month of February and view the collection of antique perfume bottles, gloves, handkerchiefs and other Valentine keepsakes that will be on display.

Who knows what inspirations of love will be evoked. ☺



## Historical Highlights

by Tony Kriss, President

November 30th, 1997, was a red letter day for those of us fortunate enough to have enjoyed the privilege of a private tour of the Pasadena home in which J. Sydney Torrance once resided.

Despite the fact that the then present owners, Mr. & Mrs. Qvale, were in the process of moving, they graciously guided us through this magnificent 1904 Tudor mansion.

Amazingly, we located the only two remaining relatives of Mr. Torrance, both of whom were also first time visitors to this outstanding architectural gem.

1997 was indeed a great year for THS members, and as you can see, 1998 is off to a great start with first the Ramona Pageant to be followed by a VIP tour of the new Getty Museum.

Our Museum has been selected as the host for the Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies which coincides with the California State Sesquicentennial of the Discovery of Gold. We are planning to make this a broad based community event and welcome the support of all who wish to participate.

We again wish to thank American Honda for funding the second installment of their generous grant, and McDonnell Douglas for their generous gift which is allowing us to develop an interesting booklet documenting the history of Torrance. It is designed for elementary school students. It is this type of support and participation that enables us to preserve and share our rich history.

As is obvious, your Board and Staff are working diligently to make our Museum and its project a real Community asset. Come visit, enjoy and support our exhibits and activities. *The Museum belongs to you!* ☺

### J. Sydney Home Tour — continued from page 1

This 30 room house in South Pasadena always intrigued Molly. She referred to it as the “Mystery House”, as it was shrouded by ivy.

The couple’s daughter and son-in-law live just a few doors down the street, and in fact, there is still a path that leads from Torrance’s house to their home. Originally, all that land used to be part of

the home’s famous gardens before it was subdivided and sold off.

Every time Molly came by to visit her daughter, she would say that one day she would like to own this house of “mystery” and unveil its hidden beauty.



Ragnor & Molly Qvale — our gracious hosts.

After purchasing the home, removal of the ivy was the first make-over to take place.

Each floor of the house has 4,000 square feet, and is quite livable. Personally, I feel it would take you at least a week to get to know your way around this house.

This home also has an indoor lap pool down below the terrace, which looks like it could still hold water because the tiles remain virtually uncracked. There are several changing rooms, a shower and stained glass windows in the pool room.

The Qvale’s shared their beautiful home with a half dozen foreign exchange students. The couple have enjoyed many a meal, prepared by a European chef, in the formal dining room with the students.

The Qvale’s have been buying and restoring classical old homes like this for years. The new home owners, a young couple with a brand new baby, will continue the restoration.

Ragnor and Molly will venture to Sun Valley, Idaho, to see what new adventures await them. ☺

# The Ramona Pageant Tour

You're invited to join the Torrance Historical Society on a bus trip to The Ramona Pageant on



A scene from the 1923 production.

Saturday, April 18th. The history of this 75 year pageant is described best on their Web Site ([www.pe.net/~ramona](http://www.pe.net/~ramona)):

“For 75 years, the famed *Ramona* Pageant has been presented in the beautiful Ramona Bowl by the people of Hemet and San Jacinto. Based on the classic novel *Ramona* by Helen Hunt Jackson, the show uses an entire mountain side as its stage.

A cast of more than 425 actors, dancers, singers and horsemen tell the poignant love story of Ramona and her Indian hero, Alessandro.

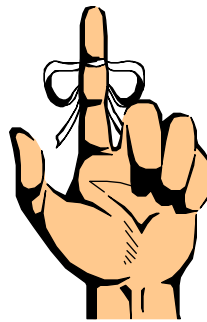
Jackson (1830-1885) was a popular 18th Century novelist, poet and travel writer. In 1879 she became involved in the “Indian Rights” movement, trying to improve the Government’s treatment of Indians on and off the reservations. She wrote *Ramona* to try and change public opinion towards the Indians.”

This pageant holds special memories for veteran THS board member, Gene Hassan. Both her mother and father were cast in the very first Ramona Pageant 75 years ago! For details about the tour call (310) 328-5392. ☺

## Sister City Celebrates 25

30+ delegates from Kashiwa, Japan, are coming to Torrance in February to help celebrate 25 years of Sister Cityhood! While here, they will receive a VIP tour of the Museum. ☺

*Torrance Historian Newsletter* • January 1998



## It's Time to Renew & Win

It's time to renew your membership in the Torrance Historical Society. All memberships are renewable annually by February, except Lifetime memberships.

If you renew your membership by **February 13th**, you will automatically be entered into a drawing to win a free dinner at *Cafe Luna*, a delicious local Italian restaurant. The winner will be announced in the next newsletter.

As an active member of the Torrance Historical Society, you will continue to enjoy:

- Invitations to special “Members Only” events
- Research privileges in the Museum’s historic archives
- The opportunity to become a Torrance Historian
- The opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors
- A subscription to the *Torrance Historian* Newsletter
- Docent Training

The cost to renew your membership or sign someone up as a new member is:

Adult \$15.00	• Family \$20.00
Youth (-18) \$10.00	• Senior (65+) \$10.00
Businesses \$40.00	• Organizations \$40.00
	Life \$250.00

It is the goal of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum to make history accessible to every resident, to encourage each of us to learn about our past, and to help realize our future.

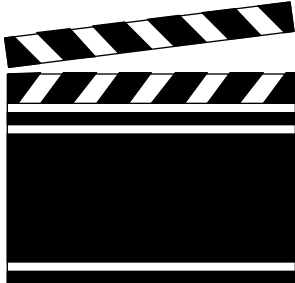
Thank you in advance for your continued membership support! ☺

## The Perfect Gift

Wondering what to buy that special someone in your life who has everything? How 'bout a membership to the Torrance Historical Society? ☺



## Lights – Camera – Action!



On January 26th, former Torrance Mayor, Jim Armstrong will interview Grace Elgin, Coordinator of the Museum for the past 16 years, for a program entitled “*Getting the Business in Torrance.*” This program will focus on the businesses that have been thriving in Torrance

for years, such as Allen & Gary’s, Ella’s, Torrance Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning, Lovelady Hardware to name a few, and the many opportunities that are here for new businesses. As Jim Armstrong put it, “You cannot talk about the local longtime businesses without interviewing Grace Elgin at the Museum — it wouldn’t be complete.”

The show will appear on CitiCable the second week in February and air three times a day (9:30AM, 2:30PM, 9:30PM) for one week. ☺

## Changing of the Guard

Recently, Carl Kaemerle regretfully resigned from his position as THS Treasurer, due to a heavy schedule of commitments and family obligations. We will miss him, but on the bright side, Carl will continue to docent at the Museum and other THS events, when needed.

Dan Gutknecht, who was nominated as THS Historian and previously held the position of Treasurer, agreed to fill-in for the remainder of Carl’s term. Richard Meyer was nominated to fill the vacancy of THS Historian. *Thank you Dan, and welcome to the team Richard!* ☺

## Work In Progress

### *The Red Car – A Torrance Treasure*

If you’ve ever strolled through Wilson Park, you may have noticed an old railway car tucked behind the greened-out chain link fence on the north side of the park (across from the horseshoe pits). This is no ordinary railway car, but a piece of history — *with a story waiting to be told.*

For a few years now, a committed group of men and women have met on the second Saturday of the month to restore this hidden Torrance treasure, the Red Car.

Richard Meyer, Chairman of the Red Car Work Committee and THS Historian, shares the history of the Red Car below:

The Red Car is an electric train, or electric motor coach, that was built in 1911 by American Car & Foundry for Southern Pacific Railway in the Oakland East Bay area. The car had seating for 116 people, so it was called the “Big Red Car.” This car was numbered #315, and kept that number for 35 years until it was renumbered #4601 by Pacific Electric (P.E.).

In 1942, the car no longer in use in the Bay

area, was sold to U.S. Maritime Commission for use in the Los Angeles area for operation on the Pacific Electric. It was used to carry workers for war production activities.

After #315 was demotorized, it went to the Union Pacific (U.P.) for steam operation between Los Angeles and Riverside. The cars used on the U.P. were later purchased by P.E. for parts.

Car #315 was put back into service, as a shop car between Los

*continued on page 5*

**WANTED**

**Museum Docents**

**Male or Female  
Young or Old**

**Sunday from 1-4 PM  
Orientation available**

**Call 320-7034**

**Reward: Knowing  
that you were there  
to open the doors of  
history to others!**

# THS Chosen to Host State Wide Conference



In early June, the Torrance Historical Society will have the privilege of hosting the annual *Conference of California Historical Societies*. Out of all of the historical societies in California, THS was chosen to do the honors this year.

This four day event is state wide, so there will be well over 200 historians from the border of Mexico to the northern reaches of California coming to visit Torrance to learn “*What’s in a Name*” — the title of this year’s conference. There will be tours, dinners and special events to attend. Watch your *Torrance Historian* newsletter for details! ☺

## Chili Cook-off

On Saturday, February 7th, the Torrance Woman’s Club will host a *Chili Feed — Cook-off & Line Dance Party* to benefit the Torrance Public Library. This fiery-eatin’, boot scootin’ event will take place inside one of the historic buildings of Torrance — The Torrance Woman’s Club.



Chili judging and eating will take place at 6:00 PM and line dancing will begin at 8:00 PM. Bring your family and join the fun. Tickets are just \$8 per person. For additional information, please contact Janet Payne at (310) 328-7549.

## Quote of the Day

“May all of your troubles last as long as your New Year’s resolutions.”

— *Joey Adams* ☺

*Work In Progress* — continued from page 4

Angeles and Torrance shops.

On October 19, 1945, due to heavy fog, #315 was involved in a head-on collision with a freight train on the Torrance line — 128th and Athens Way.

The car was brought to the Torrance shop where it was purchased by Forest Wilson. Mr. Wilson moved it to Newton Street in Torrance, and used it as a house and later a workshop.

In 1987, after 41 years at the Newton Street location, the City of Torrance acquired the Big Red Car and moved it to the maintenance area of Wilson Park.

In 1993, after an attempt to relocate the car to Long Beach, the City Council, in conjunction with the Torrance Historical Society, voted to keep the Red Car as a preservation project.

A working committee was formed and has been working on restoring #315 ever since. Richard Meyers explained, “The car is simply made out of beautiful constructed iron work with rivets, steel members and plates.”

Red Car restoration takes place on the second Saturday of every month, and goes from about 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM.

If you are interested in helping to restore a priceless piece of the past, please contact Richard Meyer for details at (310) 643-7745. ☺

## Free Train Rides

On the first Sunday of every month at Charles Wilson Park, the local *Live Steamer Association* sponsors a free train ride on trains they have built themselves.



So gather your friends and family, pack a picnic lunch, head to the park and hop aboard a miniature steam train. The “Train Station” is open from 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM. Donations are welcome. ☺

## 17th Annual Quilt Show

In March, the South Bay Quilters Guild will host the 17th annual quilt show — “Old Fans, New Fantasies”. There will be over 100 quilts on display, a wall quilt auction, a quilt education area, snacks and more. Also, for a nominal fee, quilt appraisals will be given by AQS-certified appraisers.

Here are the details:

**Dates:** Saturday, March 7th 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM  
Sunday, March 8th 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

**Place:** Torrance Recreation Center / Cultural Arts Center

**Costs:** \$5 general admission, \$4 for seniors (60+)

For additional information, contact Yvonne Peterson at (310) 377-5916. ☺

## Memorabilia Needed

The Museum is interested in dedicating a display for our city’s founder, J. Sydney Torrance. Do you have any related hidden treasures you would like to loan to the Museum for the display? If so, please contact Janet Payne at (310) 328-7549. ☺

## Torrance Historical Society & Museum

1345 Post Avenue  
Torrance, CA 90501

*Return Services Requested*

## Inside

- ◆ Tour of J. Sydney Torrance’s Home
- ◆ Ramona Pageant Tour
- ◆ Sister City Celebrates 25 Years
- ◆ THS Hosts Conference of California Historical Societies

## Guess Who Tied the Knot?



On December 14th, 1997, Tony Kriss, President of THS, married his sweetheart, Gussie Gross, longtime THS board member. The two were married in a private ceremony by a very close friend who is a judge. Tony explained, that “after 14 years of ‘honeymooning’, phase two of our honeymoon began with the marriage.”

*Congratulations, and . . . may you live happily ever after!* ☺

## Museum Hours

The Torrance Historical Society and Museum is open free to the public:

Tuesday - Thursday & Sunday  
1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

*Special hours can be arranged for private tours or research. Please contact the Museum directly at (310) 328-5392. ☺*

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Torrance, CA  
Permit No. 27