



Fall 2008

Cliff Numark,
Editor

TORRANCE HISTORIAN

Newsletter of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum

Names on the Wall Students Research Lives of War Dead



During the last Spring school quarter, history and government students at North and Torrance High Schools researched and wrote biographical accounts of some of the 146 service personnel who are remembered on the Memorial Wall at Torrance Civic Center.

The Torrance Historical Society Board proposed and underwrote the project to gather and preserve the too-short life stories of these heroes.

The Society, led by historian Jerry Ronan, collected the scant information from local public records and supplied study guides for the research.

Torrance Unified School District Curriculum

(The Wall, Continued on page 3)

Upcoming Events

Farming in Torrance – Sept. 14,
2 p.m. FREE!

Walking Tours of Old
Torrance – 1:30 – 3 p.m.,
Sept. 28, Oct. 26. FREE!

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

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: GENE HIGGINBOTHAM

More Than Garden Variety

The Torrance Historical Society (THS) is one of those organizations that appears, from the outside, to be another garden variety *get-involved-with-your-local-community* group.

You know the kind . . . go to a meeting, plan events, raise funds, meet new people, etc. That's what I thought when I first joined the Torrance Historical Society & Museum. Sure, we do have meetings and plan events and all those things, but "garden variety" – NO WAY!

First, let me say that the THS is not just another organization in the City of Torrance – *it IS the City of Torrance*. It is where you learn about the *beginning* of Torrance when Jared Sidney Torrance planned a brand new city in the South Bay. Jared Sidney, by the way, did not want the city named after him because he was a rather modest person, but with huge ideas, of course!

(President's Column, Continued on page 4)

Torrance Knows How to Rock!

Good golly Miss Molly, did we ever Rock Around the Block! On Thursday, July 17th, the Torrance Historical Society hosted its fourth annual Rock Around the Block party in celebration of when the City received the All-America City Award back in the late 50s.

There were well over 1,200 people boppin' along the vintage car-lined Post Avenue.

Sponsored by TOYOTA USA Automobile Museum, the 1950s-style family summer event celebrated Torrance's All-America City Award -- one of America's original and most prestigious community recognition awards. The City received this award for "Growth without strain" back in the 1956 when Albert Isen was Mayor of Torrance.

This event was hosted in cooperation with the City of Torrance, the Torrance Historical Society, TOYOTA USA Automobile Museum, Torrance Citi-CABLE 3, Costco, Torrance Bakery and the Old Torrance Neighborhood Association.

Participants...

Viewed vintage cars on display along Post Avenue, courtesy of Cruisin' 50s Car Club, local car owners, and TOYOTA USA Automobile Museum;

Bopped to '50s music;

Munched on burgers from the IN-N-OUT burger wagon;

Saw special exhibits featuring the original congratulatory telegram from President Eisenhower, along with the All-America City button & logo;

Slurped milk shakes made with vintage machines by real "soda jerks";

Checked-out high school yearbooks -- the Torrance Historical Society has the biggest collection; and

Entered the hula hoop, bubble gum blowin', cake walk and pie eating contests.



Kashiwa Students Arrive in Torrance

In 1973, Torrance established a sister-city relationship with Kashiwa, Japan, as part of the Sister Cities International program. For the past 35 years, our City has enjoyed cultural exchange with Kashiwa – in particular, the yearly student exchange program.

Last month, the eight Kashiwa kids, their leader and Translator, visited the Torrance Historical Society & Museum.

They learned . . .

- Jared Sidney Torrance's vision for a planned City;
- about the cowboys who once rounded-up cattle on farmland, which is now bustling city streets;
- how old toasters worked; and
- about the Rose Parade – we even taught them how to do the parade wave.

Each year, we look forward to the Kashiwa students touring our Museum. Smiles and hugs need no translation!



TORRANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD **WWW.TORRANCEHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG**

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consultant Margaret Esfahani, high school teachers Pat Zartman and Lorelee Spradlin of Torrance High School; Diane Nelson and Ali Rabiei of North High School, coordinated the project.

Society Board members judged the papers and made \$100 awards to the seven best papers.

Student winners and their subjects: Torrance High School: Christine Lee - WW II Army S/Sgt Akira Roy Shimatsu, THS '39; Team of Kathlene Pangilinan and Rachelle Gonzales - WW II USA Air Cadet James S. Prowten, THS '43; Lauren Toda - WW II Air Force Lt. William R. Stewart, THS; Chelsea Limm - Vietnam Army Cpl. Terrence Arthur Kandler; Joseph Park - Vietnam Army SP4-E4 Stephen Mix Lewis, NHS '67; Alexis Higginbotham - Vietnam Army Cpl William W. Kirkpatrick, SHS '67.

North High School: Loralyn Thompson - Vietnam Marine PFC Gary William Purcell, THS '67.

Additional information is needed for this project.

Families and friends of *Names on the Wall* personnel are invited to share pictures and written information with the Torrance Historical Society in this on-going project to help honor heroes of Torrance.

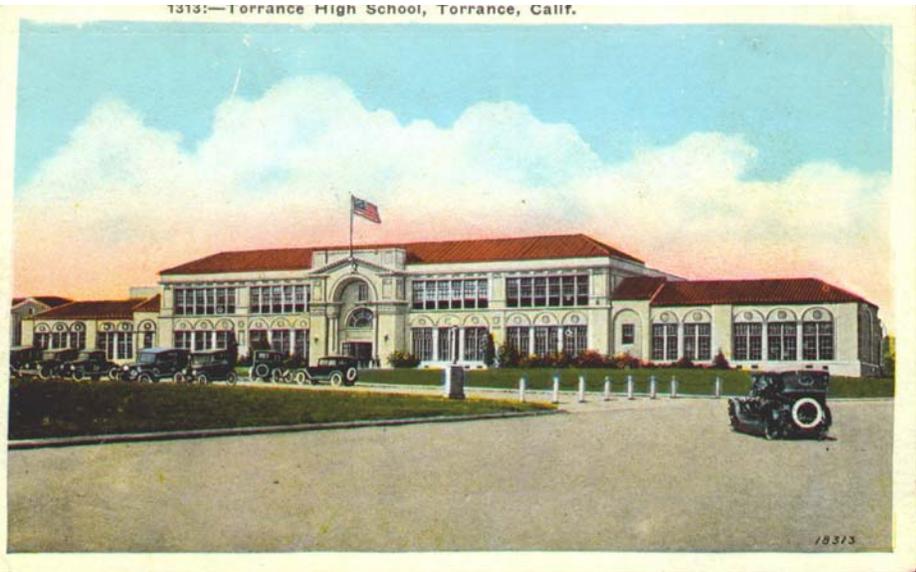
Authors on Parade

The Museum is hosting an Authors' Day on Sunday, November 16th, at 2:00 p.m. You will have an opportunity to meet local authors and have them sign your book.

Book titles include *Devil at my Heels* (Louis Zamperini), *History of the Early Hollywood Riviera* (Marshall E. Stewart), *Lawndale* (James Osborne), *Ridge Route: The Road that United California* (Harrison I. Scott), *The History of Torrance Schools — 1890 - 2000* (Tom Rische), *Torrance Airport* (Chuck Lobb), and others.

Each author will have a few minutes to summarize their publication, and will be available for questions and to sign their notable books.

Light refreshments will be served. No reservations are required. This presentation is free, and open to the public, but seating is limited, so arrive early.



Postcard of Torrance High School from the early days.

(President's Column, Continued from page 1)

It is where you learn about the first "Planned City" with industry, businesses, houses and grocery stores all located within walking distances of each other (community developments 90 years later are now embracing this better idea).

It is where you learn about the beginning of our local government – the first City Council, the first landmark buildings, our first fire station and our first Rose Parade float. It is where you learn about our struggles as a new city, an evolving community of people who raised strawberries in our fields. It is about these same people who were carted off to live in concentration camps during WWII. It is about our local heroes who died in wars and who represented us in the World Olympics.

It is the *development* of our city with fantastic new neighborhoods rising above abandoned oil fields. It is where you learn about our very own United States Presidential "All-America City Award". It is about our beach. Yes, the City of Torrance does have a beach and the Hollywood Riviera history that goes along with that! And, it is about NOW. Preserving our history for future generations.

It is about our children who visit the museum and learn about the community in which they live. With programs developed by our own *volunteer staff*, children learn about our community and contribute to our history through their very own research projects.

It is about protecting records and newspaper articles, and making these documents accessible for everyone. It is about partnering with City Officials and local preservation enthusiasts to protect our original houses and buildings.

Yes, we do have meetings and we do plan events, but thanks to our staff of research experts, historians, teachers, preservationists, comedians and elected officials, we have the City of Torrance right here in this wonderful organization. I am very honored and proud to be the new President of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum. I look forward to continue on with the charge of Torrance history education and preservation that my predecessors so brilliantly initiated.

Gene Higginbotham has served on the Torrance Historical Society and Museum Board of directors as Secretary, Financial Secretary, and Treasurer, and is excited to be our newest President. He lives in Old Torrance with his wife Vicki, and two daughters, Alexis and Mia (both students at Torrance High School). Gene and his family are currently restoring the oldest house in Torrance.

Surf's Up at the Hollywood Riviera

On Sunday, August 3rd, the Torrance Historical Society headed to Torrance Beach (yes, Torrance does have its very own beach – one-and-a-half miles of it) for the 2008 International Surf Festival.

Our booth was located in Miramar Park – the original site of the Hollywood Riviera Beach Club. In fact, we were sitting where the dining room once stood.

We invited Marshall Stewart, author of *History of the Early Hollywood Riviera*, and nephew of Clifford F. Reid, developer of the Hollywood Riviera, to spend the afternoon with us autographing his book. We had a steady stream of visitors all day.

Marshall's memory of the early Hollywood Riviera is amazing.

He shared many a story including how the red roof tiles were originally made.

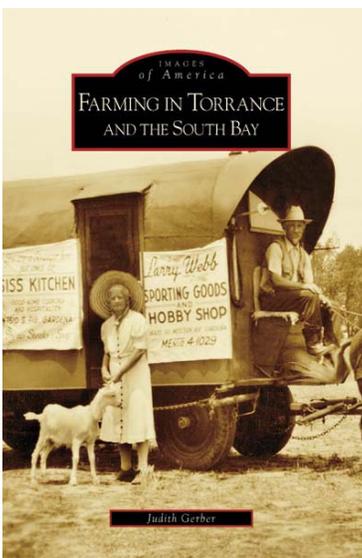
He recounted how the workers shaped the tiles over their thigh. Talk about handmade – no two tiles



Janet Payne, Debbie Hays and Marshall Stewart. Standing in the location where the dining room of the Hollywood Riviera Beach Club once stood.

were alike. A copy of the *History of the Early Hollywood Riviera* is available at the Museum during its operating hours.

Torrance's Farming Roots: A Great Legacy



Come celebrate the beginning of Fall with us, and meet the farmers of Torrance and the South Bay on Sunday, September 14th, at 2:00 p.m., at the Museum.

Judith Gerber, Torrance native and author of *Farming in Torrance and the South Bay*, will introduce you, vicariously through her new book, to the men and women who once farmed the land of Torrance and surrounding cities.

With a collection of photos obtained from the Torrance Historical Society and other sources, Judi documents how family farmers, throughout the early

years, contributed to the City's economy by raising cattle, pigs, turkeys, as well as sugar beets, alfalfa, beans, hay, oats barley and flowers.

Judi is dedicated to preserving the rich history of the state's family farmers. Judi's new book will be available for purchase and signing on this day – be one of the first to own a copy of this book!

Light refreshments will be served. No reservations are required.

This presentation is free, and open to the public, but seating is limited, so arrive early.

- Fall Home Tour!!
- Honoring Torrance War Heroes
- Authors on Parade
- Rocking and Rolling
- Kashiwa in Torrance
- Surf's Up In The Riviera
- Farming in Torrance: The Legacy

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The Torrance
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Torrance Historical Society & Museum
1345 Post Avenue
Torrance, CA 90501
310-328-5392
www.TorranceHistoricalSociety.org

THE NEW TORRANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM BOARD



The new board was installed at a wonderful event in June honoring Louis Zamperini. Gene Higginbotham will serve as the president for 2008/2009, along with a fantastic group of returning board members and newcomers!

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