

# Torrance Historian

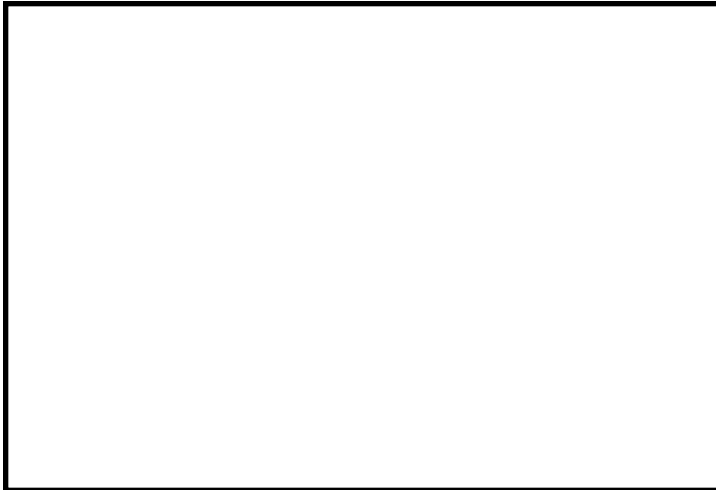
Published for members, this newsletter is dedicated to the support & preservation of Torrance History — *share the history with your family & friends!*

July 1998

Debbie Hays, Editor

## Conference a Grand Success **Red Car Update**

Last Month the Torrance Historical Society (THS) had the privilege of hosting the annual meeting of the California Conference of Historical Societies (CCHS). Out of all of the historical societies in California, THS was chosen to do the honors.



*Tony Kriss, THS President (left) with Louis Zamperini*

This four day event is state wide, so there were well over 100 historians from the northern reaches of Placer County to the beaches of San Diego who visited Torrance and learned about our City's historical background.

There were tours, dinners and special events to attend, and the people enjoyed themselves immensely. We invited a couple of attendees to tell you about the events, in their words:

*"The Torrance Historical Society did a good job hosting CCHS . . . you really showed off Torrance and all its history!"*

— Claire Crain  
Founding member of THS

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## *TransMachine Concept Comes to Life*

As you probably know, in 1987, the City discovered that a Pacific Electric Red Car was right here in our own backyard. Well, actually in Virginia Wilson's backyard where it had, at one time, been converted into a home and later used as a machine shop. The car was about to be scrapped, when the City intervened and received the Red Car as a donation from Virginia Wilson, who wanted to develop the land where the car had been located since 1946. The Red Car has since been stored at Wilson Park.

In 1993, a developer showed some interest in purchasing the Torrance Red Car. The City Council requested a study and on October 26, 1993, decided to keep the car for restoration by a qualified local non-profit community group willing to oversee the work. The Torrance Historical Society consented to take on the project, which was to be funded by the donation and volunteers without public funds. With limited funds and volunteer labor, restoration progressed slowly — on the second Saturday of every month.

In early 1996, City staff, Barbara Johnson and John Powers from the Cultural Arts Center developed a concept known as the TransMachine. They proposed to authentically restore the exterior of the Red Car, while transforming its interior to a learning center focused on the subject of transportation.

Through computer and communication systems, students would acquire skills necessary to design and create new forms of transportation.

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## Historical Highlights

by Tony Kriss, President

As host to the annual meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies (June 18-20), the Torrance Historical Society provided both first-time and repeat visitors an insight into many of the unique historical features of our City, area and citizens.

After presenting a video on Torrance, our guests were provided choices of a private tour of the Rancho Dominguez and chapel hosted by Father Patrick McPolin; presentations on genealogical research techniques; the history of Zamperini Field as well as a walking tour of historic downtown Torrance, the Madrona Marsh, the Torrance Cultural Arts Center and the Katy Geissert Civic Center Library and more.

Visitors to the Rancho enjoyed the rare privilege of visiting the subterranean sanctuary dedicated to the graves of the last Dominquez daughter and her husband, Gregorio del Amo, where we were astounded to learn that, as a seminarian, Father Pat had dug their last resting place!

Mayor Dee Hardison welcomed everyone to the Friday evening Museum Reception, which was followed by a sumptuous buffet in the adjoining patio of the Barlett Center co-sponsored by Mobil.

This outstanding event provided Conferees a special opportunity to learn more about our history directly from our members, museum displays and guest exhibitors. In addition to raffle prizes provided by many civic organizations, everyone received a bag full of goodies from Mobil at the end of a delightful evening.

The highlight event was the installation banquet, featuring Mr. Louis Zamperini as guest of honor. The overflow crowd viewed the incredible documentary *Zamperini the Great* — the award-winning CBS documentary featuring his distinguished life, which was broadcast worldwide during the 1998 Winter Olympics to an audience of 30 million. Immediately upon conclusion of the film, the entire audience rose as one to express their respect and admiration with a prolonged period of spontaneous applause. Copies of this documentary may be available at the Museum — we'll keep you posted.

*continued on page 5*

## What I Like Best About Torrance

*From a 4th Grader's Point of View*

Back in November 1996, Mr. Willie Tokishi, of American Honda Motor Co., Inc., endowed the Torrance Historical Society with a \$10,000 grant. Mr. Tokishi asked that particular emphasis be placed on making the history of Torrance available to our present *and* our future citizens, our children.

With the children in mind, Debbie Hays, 4th Vice President of THS, arranged with Torrance Elementary teacher, Mrs. Jan Johnston, to have her 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade class write an essay on what they like best about Torrance. She explained that the winner would have his/her story published in the July issue of the *Torrance Historian Newsletter*.

Mrs. Johnston gave the essay as a writing assignment to her class. 24 children participated, so it was difficult to select a winner, as all the stories were winners to us. But . . . as you will soon read for yourself, 10 year old, Natalie Jones' story proved to be the winner. What makes it even more impressive is the fact that this assignment was done *in class* and not given as homework — so there was no parental assistance/intervention.

Natalie's story, *exactly* as she wrote it:

Hi, this is Natalie and I'm here to tell you all about Torrance. It's a great place, but I love the rec center. There you can do art, music, plays, you name it, it's there. If you love to dance you can go to the Armstrong theatre and do the cha-cha and macarena. Well, you get the idea.

Then it's off to the mall for some shopping! Maybe you'll want some sport stuff, go to the sport store. If you love stylish clothes, go to Sears, Macys, or Robinsons May. If you want some food drop by on some of the restaurants. They're great!

Say you're tired out and just want to sit down in a cozy corner and read. Then come to the Southeast library. They have computers for research, a water fountain with cold water and don't forget the books! Have fun reading!

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## *Thank You To Our Sponsors*

A special *thank you* goes out to the following businesses and individuals who supported the Torrance Historical Society & Museum in hosting the 1998 California Conference of Historical Societies (CCHS) — entitled *What's in a Name — Torrance A to Z: Gregorio del Amo to Louis Zamperini*. Thanks to the support of our sponsors and volunteers, attendees left with an understanding of our City's rich history.

*Thank you to:*

### **Friday — Museum Reception**

**Art Almeida** & staff for selecting Torrance as the host City for the 1998 CCHS meeting.

**The Daily Breeze** for the press coverage.

**Grace Elgin** for her role as Administrative Asst.

**Mary Green** for reprising her role as Mrs. Jared Sidney Torrance (circa 1925).

**Sue Herbers**, City Clerk & THS Special Events Chair and **Maureen O'Donnell**, City Council-woman & THS Parliamentarian for serving as our hostesses.

**Lucille McComas** for registration & bookkeeping.

**Harry McVeigh**, West Region Manager of **Mobil**, for presenting THS with a generous donation!

**Andrea Payne** and **Sandy McFarland** for setting-up, serving, and cleaning-up.

**Janet Payne** THS 1st Vice President for setting up the display of young ladies graduation fashions.

**Arnold Plank** THS member and TUSD Superintendent for lending the Museum the framed original blueprint of Torrance High School celebrating 50 years of the Torrance Unified School District.

**Janice Plank**, THS 3rd Vice President, for coordinating the buffet catered by Cafe Luna (served by Robert and Shawn).

### **Special Exhibitors & Prize Donations**

**Bob Garret** — Curtiss-Wright Historical Assoc.

**Barbara Johnson & John Powers** — City of Torrance TransMachine (our Red Car) Project.

**Mary Hoffman** — Torrance Rose Float Assoc.

**Hazel Tanaguchi** — Torrance Sister City Assoc.

**Shirley Turner** — Madrona Marsh

**Carolyn Keith** of **Mobil** for coordinating volunteers to set-up our featured exhibit *Mobil — Through the Years*. **Sharon Cristino, Gary Curry** and **Patty Gutierrez** for setting-up, and handing out the *great* prizes donated by Mobil.

### **Guest Speakers/Tour Guides**

**Beth Wilson** — Genealogy Presentation

**Janet Payne** — Walking Tour of Downtown

**Chuck Lobb** — Torrance Airport/Zamperini Field

**Shirley Turner & Walt Wright** — Madrona Marsh Walking Tour

**Connie Hodgson** — How to Bring History to Contemporary Settings

### **Saturday — Zamperini Banquet**

**Peggy Basil** and **Sue Herbers** for registering banquet attendees.

**Mayor Dee Haridson** for serving as our Honorary Chair & **Janet Payne** for serving as Event Chair.

**Tony Kriss** for serving as Master of Ceremonies.

**Rev. Patrick J. McPolin** for the invocation.

**Vicki Snyder** of *Torrance People* for the “ink”.

**Louis & Pete Zamperini** for attending the banquet and sharing their amazing story.

### **Distinguished Corporate Sponsors**

**City of Torrance** — Office of the Mayor, City Manager, Cultural Arts Center, Library, Park Services, Parks & Recreation.

**Del Amo Mall** for sponsoring the big screen used to show the CBS Zamperini documentary.

**Dominguez Water Co.** for the colorful pencils.

**Green Hills Memorial Park** for punch, wine and champagne.

**Honda** for their continuing support.

Office of Supervisor **Don Knabe** - transportation.

**Mobil** for co-sponsoring goodie bags and travel basket (won by Grace Elgin, Museum Curator).

**Southern California Edison** for the night lights.

**Torrance Chamber of Commerce** for the tote bags, maps and assorted goodies.

**Torrance Parks & Rec. Dept.** for the note pads.

**What I Like About Torrance** — continued from page 2

Then when you're hungry, hop in the car and drive to La Capilla. Then if it's a hot day go to Foster's Freeze in Old Torrance. You'll get anything you want that has to do with ice cream. So enjoy!

If you love natural wonders go to Madrona Marsh and see what Torrance looked like before people came. See birds and wildlife. If you want a tour, just ask the people in the blue trailer. You'll love it. It's a great place!

Now you see why Torrance is such a great place. It's the place to be for vacations. Everyone's friendly and polite. So come on, join in on the fun.

By: Natalie Jones  
Age 10  
Torrance El.  
Mrs. Johnston's class

Is that cute, or what?

The students who participated in the essay are:

Gurpreet Bhuee  
Said Canales  
Nickolas Castellvi  
Mallory Cohn  
Danielle Domizio  
Aaron Garay  
Bryan Hodson  
Natalie Jones  
Isa Laolagi  
Ashley Lowery  
James Na  
Krista Ohasho

Paul Park  
Megan Polliard  
Terra Ranier  
Mersha Refai  
Kelsey Rossier  
Marissa Sanchez  
Amanda Spaho  
John Sullivan  
Byron Vlado  
Shane Walker  
Jeffrey Weaver  
Melissa White

The Historical Society mailed each student a thank you letter for participating in the essay. Each letter contained a psychedelic pencil from the Dominguez Water Co., a sticker (the official seal of the City of Torrance) and a card for a free McDonald's hamburger (donated by the McDonald's located at the corner of Carson Street and Denker).

Natalie received a City of Torrance tote bag, filled with the same goodies mentioned above, plus a commemorative THS pin, a City of

Torrance pin, THS stationery, stickers, and other miscellaneous items — including a *Dinner for Two* gift certificate donated by La Capilla!

Natalie's story also appeared in the July issue of *Torrance People* (page 25).

The Torrance Historical Society is always developing new ways to reach the children, and to get them involved with their city. Having the kids write *what they like best about Torrance*, makes these future historians think about their city in a positive light, and will perhaps spark an interest in preserving their community. ☺

## Historical Home Tour

### *Experience Past Glories, Unfolding in Present Times*

This Fall brings with it the much anticipated bi-annual tour of historical homes in Downtown Torrance. Over a half dozen homes will be on display — all of which are located within walking distance from the Torrance Historical Society & Museum, where the tour begins.

There will be a mix of sizes, styles and ages. Each home, though updated to accommodate a 90's life-style, has preserved the charming architecture and characteristics that separate these old homes from today's "cookie cutter" houses.

The wood floors, glass doorknobs, original woodwork, double hung and hand pressed glass windows are just a few of the features that have been preserved.

This eclectic, yet harmonious, mix of yesterday and today provides a balanced glimpse of past glories unfolding in present times.

Mark October 10th & 11th on your calendar for this self-guided tour of historic homes. ☺

### Historical Home Tour



**Saturday & Sunday  
October 10th & 11th**

**Red Car Update** — continued from page 1

As follow up, classes in model building would provide an opportunity to build three-dimensional prototype designs and computer drawings created in the TransMachine.

Realizing the positive potential that the TransMachine would have on the community, the Torrance Historical Society supported the idea that the City's heritage and history would be preserved while vesting new life in a unique and meaningful educational center.

Willie Tokishi of American Honda took great interest in the project and in April of 1997 American Honda provided seed money to explore the project's future. The TransMachine would be a collaborative effort between the City, schools, and public/private corporations. They would all work together in supporting education and creativity while preserving the character, heritage, and high standards of the community.

It is currently being proposed that the Red Car be permanently installed atop the Southern Pacific Railroad Bridge (the bridge is located on Torrance Blvd., west of Western Ave.). Three-dimensional sketches of the TransMachine concept are currently on display at the Museum.

Today we are looking for commencement of the project in 1998 and hope for completion in the year 2000. ☺

## Jared Sidney Torrance Trivia

This interesting bit of trivia was contributed by Janet Payne, 1st Vice President of THS.

Torrance Memorial Medical Center continues to carry on the work of the City's first hospital — Jared Sidney Torrance Memorial Hospital, which originally opened its doors on Engracia Avenue in 1925. The relocated facility, on Lomita Blvd., named its computer system "Sidney". When dedicating its new cafeteria, everyone again thought of Mr. Torrance and named it "Jared's Place!"

Maybe some day they'll name the senior Advantage Program walkers the "Torrance Trotters."

Thanks for your contribution Janet! ☺

**Historical Highlights** — continued from page 2

Your attention is also directed to the July edition of *Torrance People*, which included a feature on Jared Sidney Torrance (page 5) and the banquet event (page 38).

Acknowledgments of the broad support of those who helped make this an outstanding conference are listed on page 3 of this newsletter — to all, I extend my compliments and thanks.

A special salute to Janet Payne, 1st Vice President of THS and Chair of the Conference, for her outstanding efforts that helped make this an event that will long be remembered.

Sponsorship of the annual CCHS meeting was the first major project of the new THS Officers — and a great success. My compliments to all! ☺

## Docents Needed

Volunteers are needed to docent at the Museum on Sunday afternoons from 1:00 p.m.- 4:00 p.m. Orientation is available. For details, call Gene Hassan at (310) 618-8259. ☺

## Two Honored with Jared Sidney Torrance Award

John A. Bramhall, former Torrance City Clerk and Stanley E. Remelmeyer, former President of the Torrance Historical Society and retired City Attorney (served for 33 years), were honored with the Jared Sidney Torrance Award on June 23rd at the City Council Meeting.

In 1984, the Jared Sidney Torrance Award was established by the Torrance City Council. This prestigious award is given to citizens who have continuously served the community through a lifetime of leadership and dedication. Both men have exemplified these qualities with their years of service to various organizations.

Their commitments to the City of Torrance have been exceptional and are to be admired! ☺

## Quote of the Day

"We speak longingly of the good old days because we know we won't have to live through them again."

— Toastmaster's Quips & Stories  
Sterling Publications ☺

# Current Museum Exhibits

## Summer Whites

Throughout the summer, young ladies graduation fashions from an era gone by will be on display.



## Mobil

View our Mobil — *Through the Years* exhibit, which includes memorabilia and photos. In fact, you can pick up a **free**

Pegasus antenna topper ball while you're there.

## TransMachine

The three-dimensional architectural sketches of the TransMachine (the Red Car) concept are currently on display at the Museum. It's been proposed to authentically restore the exterior of the Red Car, while transforming its interior to a learning center focused on the subject of transportation. 😊

## Torrance Historical Society & Museum

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*Return Services Requested*

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*Conference a Grand Success - continued from page 1*

*"As I read the wartime Torrance Herald newspaper articles, which I sent to CBS Sports, my admiration of Captain Louis Zamperini could only grow. What an honor it was then, and humbling, to sit beside him (and his fond brother Pete) while viewing his odyssey of survival and persecution, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to exchange a warm handshake during the ovation which he so deserved."*

— Philip J. Ross

Reference Librarian, Torrance Public Library

## El Camino Real Bells on Sale

The Torrance Historical Society is selling miniature patina replicas of the El Camino Real bells for \$32 at the Museum.

These replicas are representative of the original bells, which were placed along El Camino Real — *The Kings Highway*, by the California Federation of Women's Clubs beginning in 1906. The bells marked the footpath taken by the Franciscans while establishing the Missions north from San Diego to Sonoma. *Pick up your bell today!* 😊

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