



TORRANCE HISTORIAN

Newsletter of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum
SPRING 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:

Celebrating America's 250th

This Old House

Torrance Womens Club — Something Old | Something Borrowed

WPA Tour of the South Bay

Names on the Wall Update — Honoring Leon Culverhouse

There are Heroes Among Us — Poem by Veteran Charlie Saulinas

Upcoming Events

TORRANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

1345 Post Avenue (at Cravens) • 310.328.5392

NEW HOURS:

Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays — 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM

As always, special hours can be arranged for private tours or research.

The Torrance Historical Society has rotating special exhibits, and an ever-growing collection of photos, documents, books, artifacts and other material relevant to the City's past, and people want to get a peek at it.

Come on in and see us!

*Memberships make great gifts . . . perfect for the person who has everything!
If you purchase a Membership as a gift, upon request, the Torrance Historical
Society will mail the recipient a special certificate of notification.*



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Newsletter of the Torrance Historical Society & Museum — Spring 2026

Celebrating America's 250th



Front Row: Tim Goodrich, Chris Acherman, Michelle Polcari, Debbie Hays, Janet Payne, Rebecca Poirier – Back Row: Sharon Kalani, Jon Kaji, Bridget Lewis, George Chen, Jeremy Gerson, Aurelio Mattucci, Asam Sheikh

On Tuesday, January 13, the Torrance City Council proudly issued a proclamation declaring 2026 as America's 250th (Semiquincentennial) Anniversary. The proclamation was presented to the Torrance Historical Society in recognition of the important role that history and preservation play in our community — especially as we look ahead to July when our nation will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

The Proclamation will be on display at the Torrance Historical Society & Museum on Sunday, June 7, 2026, when the Society hosts their the Annual Meeting, which includes a birthday celebration for America.

See page 5, **Upcoming Events**, for details.

Leadership Torrance Tours this Old House

Leadership Torrance is a program focused on developing effective leaders from across the South Bay. Sponsored by the Torrance Area Chamber of Commerce, it provides opportunities for emerging leaders to take an active role towards building a stronger community.

Each year, the Torrance Historical Society hosts History Day, offering a lively look at the people, places, and organizations that helped shape our city. Former City Manager LeRoy Jackson opened the program with an insightful presentation on Torrance's oil industry. The always-entertaining duo of Janet Payne and Debbie Hays, both Historical Society Board Members, then led attendees on a walking tour through historic Old Torrance — sharing little-known stories and fun facts participants were delighted to take home and pass along. A highlight of the tour was stepping inside Judy Johnson and Clemintine's beautifully preserved 1927 Spanish Colonial Revival home. Guests were captivated by the original floors, doors, windows, and fixtures, and equally impressed by the magazine-worthy decor that brings the home's history to life.



*Leadership Torrance Class of 2026
at the home of Judy Johnson & Clementine in historic Old Torrance.*

Something Old | Something Borrowed

In October, the Torrance Woman's Club (TWC) celebrated the centennial of their Clubhouse with a Ribbon Cutting and Dessert Reception. The TWC borrowed a vintage chair, dance board, and 1925-era elegant evening wear from the Torrance Historical Society to create a vignette for display.

The Club was established in 1921, and the Clubhouse was built just four years later. The Woman's Club is a classic Spanish-style building with hardwood floors offering a historic venue located in the original footprint of the city offering one of the last genteel places to host an event.

Ribbon Cutting — Torrance Woman's Club Celebrates 100 Anniversary of Clubhouse



1925-era Vignette – historical display evoking the elegance and refinement of a bygone era

WPA Tour of the South Bay

Beginning in 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) combatted Depression-era unemployment by hiring millions of Americans to build public infrastructure and produce art. The schools, libraries, post offices, and murals that they produced featured art and architecture uniquely influenced by the Art Deco and Social Realism movements. In November, the Torrance Historical Society collaborated with the Hermosa Beach Historical Society for their bus tour focusing on New Deal, WPA Modern Style architecture, and artwork (circa 1930-40s). The group had a unique opportunity to explore the rich history and artistry of the South Bay region — covering more than 15 sites in neighboring cities including Hermosa, Redondo, Inglewood, El Segundo, and Torrance. Debbie Hays, Torrance Historical Society Board Member, met the enthusiastic group at Torrance High School (first property in Torrance to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, 1983), and together they continued on to the original site of Torrance City Hall, the post office, and Museum. They timed their visit to Torrance, so they could have lunch in The Depot Restaurant (original Pacific Electric Railway Depot — circa 1912, designed by Irving Gill). The group concluded their tour with a champagne toast at the newly-renovated Clark Building in Hermosa. ↓

Torrance Historian

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*Forever
Grateful*

Torrance Names on the Wall Highlight

By Dennis Piotrowski



For this newsletter, we are honored to highlight the heroic sacrifice of **Private First Class Leon Culverhouse, USMC**, who was killed in action in Vietnam. He was born in January 1951, one of several children of Walter "Russ" Culverhouse and Dorothy Volmerding-Culverhouse. The family lived on Falda Avenue in Torrance, and Leon attended St. Catherine Laboure School and Torrance High School.

Leon Culverhouse joined the U.S. Marine Corps when he was in high school and attained the rank of Private First Class. He married Ellen Gamache of Lomita in March 1969 when they were both only 18 years old.

Still newly wed and fresh out of boot camp, PFC Culverhouse started his tour in May 1969 and was sent to South Vietnam. He was assigned to Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division as an Antitank Assaultman, a flamethrower, where he participated in Operation Virginia Ridge.

On June 3, while on patrol outside of Cam Lo Village, PFC Culverhouse was killed by fragmentation wounds to the left side of his body from enemy mortar attacks. Six other Marines were also killed in action nearby.

Operation Virginia Ridge ended on July 16, 1969. Unclassified reports state that enemy losses for the operation were 560 killed and 17 suspects detained. The U.S. suffered a total of 106 killed and 490 wounded.

PFC Leon T. Culverhouse was awarded the Purple Heart and was survived by his widow Ellen of Lomita, his father, mother and four sisters, three of whom lived in Torrance. Services were held at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Lomita with the burial at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Culver City.

Leon Culverhouse and his family had deep local ties. He was born in Torrance and attended local schools. Both his parents worked for the Torrance Police Department.

Please visit our website at <http://www.TorranceHistoricalSociety.org> to learn more about PFC Culverhouse and the other Torrance service members who made the ultimate sacrifice. We are forever grateful for their service.



Names on the Wall Project Update

At the invitation of Deputy City Manager Viet Hoang, Kurt Weideman and Dennis Piotrowski addressed the Torrance Social Services Commission on June 26. They outlined the various programs and services that the Torrance Historical Society provides to veterans. These include the veteran acknowledgement at the Memorial Day Reading of the Names on the Wall at the Veterans Memorial, outreach support at the Torrance Veterans Appreciation Event, and the Historical Society's annual "Visit With a Veteran" Event held in November.

Kurt and Dennis also outlined to the Commission the genesis and history of the Names on the Wall Project, which was started by the late Jerry Ronan, World War II veteran and Torrance Historical Society Board Member. This project's goal is to preserve and share the legacies of the 151 Torrance service members who gave their lives in service to their country during war.

Kurt and Dennis are honored to have taken the lead on this important project after Jerry's passing. They have been helped by many volunteers over the years who have spent countless hours researching the life stories of the fallen military heroes from Torrance. Recently two new fantastic researchers have continued this tradition, Noah Kim and Mark Hays. Thanks Noah and Mark! If you would like to help, please let us know.

Finally, Kurt and Dennis were approached last year and met with the former President of the Manhattan Beach Historical Society who is looking for guidance and feedback for a similar project he is working on. He is spearheading the effort to construct a Veterans Memorial for the service members from Manhattan Beach who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Kurt and Dennis have stayed in contact with him, and are pleased to help and provide information and their experiences working on the Torrance Names on the Wall Project.

There are Heroes Among Us

Charlie Saulinas — Served in the 9th Infantry Division of the US Army from 1967-69. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Army Commendation for Valor in 1968. He was the first Vietnam Vet to be Commander of the Hollywood chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Charlie is also one of the Readers for the Torrance Historical Society's annual *Names on the Wall* Memorial Service for Torrance service personnel who gave their lives in U. S. military actions. The program takes place on Memorial Day and includes the reading of the 146 Names on the City's Memorial Wall plus the five "new" names recently added.

Today, Charlie is on a mission to make it a nationwide practice to invite Veterans and Active Service Personnel to stand to be recognized and appreciated for their service prior to inviting the rest of the audience to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. The acronym is **SAFE** – Salute Armed Forces Everyday.

Last year, he wrote this poem:

My Tour, and Maybe Yours

Some of us were sitting off a California beach waiting for a wave
Someone else was working on the family farm bailing hay
A kid from Ohio worked at the corner Texaco pumping gas
My friend from Maine had a small business cutting grass
We went to war because America needed young men
We did not know that they would ask again and again
Families with money sent their kids to college, that made them draft exempt
They could have volunteered but they knew what that meant
Twenty thousand had been killed by 1968
That's when the wise men told Johnson get out before it's too late
My best friend in Vietnam was my M16
It never let me down because I always kept it clean
Never put more than 18 bullets into a 20 round magazine
We had to drink warm water from our plastic canteen
Tracers and flares lit up the night
It was such a relief when came the daylight
We took lives and saved lives without hesitation
After a few months there we knew there were no regulations
Our leaders had planned not to win the war
We began to wonder what the hell were we there for
In all the previous wars those who served were heroes and that's a fact
When we made it home we found out the country did not want us back
With broken hearts we went on with our lives
Never understanding why we couldn't get close to our kids and our wives
Through the years we always wondered why
So many were lost and we didn't die
All through trauma the alcohol the drugs and the rage
We sit here together today defying old age
Yes we've won

*Thank you for your service, Charlie, and
your tireless efforts to advocate for Veterans.*

Upcoming Events

Docent-Led Walking Tours of Historic Old Torrance

4th Sunday of every month ▪ May – October ▪ 10:30 AM

May 24 | June 28 | July 26 | August 23 | September 27 | October 25

Sunday's free docent-led tour begins at the Torrance Historical Museum and will point-out many historic sites and landmarks of Old Torrance (founded 1912).

Names on the Wall Remembrance

Memorial Day ▪ Monday, May 25 – 2:00 PM ▪ Free

City of Torrance Veterans' Memorial Wall (Torrance Blvd. at Maple Ave.)

On Memorial Day, the Torrance Historical Society will conduct a memorial service for Torrance service personnel who gave their lives in U. S. military actions. The program will take place on the Memorial Plaza and will include the reading of the 146 Names on the Wall plus the five "new" names recently added. Those names include war losses from World War I to those in the Iraq and Afghanistan War.

Annual Membership Meeting & America's Birthday Celebration

Sunday, June 7 ▪ 11:00 AM

Museum Torrance Historical Society & Museum ▪ 1345 Post Avenue, Torrance, CA 90501
\$5.00 (\$2.50 + \$2.50) per person ▪ Reservations required - 310.328.5392

Join us for a birthday celebration for America.

Guests will be greeted at the door by period costumed members of the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution organization. There will be a reading of the Declaration of Independence by John Powers. Cupcakes and souvenirs for all ▪ Patriotic attire is encouraged ▪ This event is open to the public.

19th Annual Rock Around the Block

sponsored by the Sares Regis Group

Thursday, July 16 ▪ 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

The Torrance Historical Society invites you to put on your pedal pushers, poodle skirts or Pendleton's, and cruise on down to the Museum, and together, we'll rock around the block at the FREE family-fun Rock Around the Block event! This 1950's-style family summer event is in celebration of Torrance's All-America City Award — one of America's original and most prestigious community recognition awards.

Scaredown Downtown

Saturday, October 3 ▪ 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Historical Society will be doing temporary tattoos (for the young & young-at-heart who may be afraid of needles, blood & commitment) & selfies with Skelly, our GIANT skeleton.

Original Fall Tour of Historic Homes

Saturday & Sunday, October 10 & 11 ▪ 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Begins at Museum – \$50

Guests will tour the inside of a half-dozen homes, and see how others have renovated, updated, and decorated their historic homes to accommodate today's life-style, yet managed to preserve the charming architecture and characteristics of the past.