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**NATURAL
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MUSEUM**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

SEAVER CENTER FOR WESTERN HISTORY RESEARCH



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L.A.'s First Historical Society Donates to the Natural

History Museum

by Betty Uyeda and featuring Beth Werling

"Opening Day 1913" shown above is from an original snapshot -- one of nearly 10,000 historical items ranging in years from 1798 to 2012 that the Historical Society of Southern California offered to the museum's History Department in 2018. We are a good fit since the Society was one of the four institutions that founded the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science and Art in 1913.

The Society began in 1883 and continues as the state's oldest and most prestigious historical society. Since the beginning their collections grew significantly, while securing a place to house and properly care for these collections remained a challenge.

Ira More, curator at the Society, wrote on July 1, 1891, that "our collection is at present boxed and stored in the museum at the State Normal School building in this city... as the Society expects to soon have ample quarters in the new county court-house, where the collection can be properly displayed and cataloged...." His optimism, eight years after the formation of the Society, was fulfilled when the red sandstone Courthouse building opened later that year.

Founding member Henry Barrows wrote in a speech delivered June 19, 1908, that all the material gathered in the past 25 years were "boxed up and stored in a warehouse lately built by the county on New High Street." He went on to say that a "ton of materials" had already been donated to the City Library, and that the collection of longtime member Antonio Coronel was cared for and exhibited by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

In the ensuing years the Society gained administrative offices. In 1936 its address was the Southwest Museum in Highland Park. In November, 1948, the Earl Mansion at 2425 Wilshire Boulevard became the new permanent home as announced in their publication, *The Quarterly*. By June 1957 they relocated to 1909 South Western Avenue.

The Charles Lummis Home (*El Alisal*) in Highland Park became the headquarters in 1965 and lasted until 2014 when the Lummis Home was no longer available to the Society. It was during these years at the Lummis

Home that the Society decided to send a large portion of their photographs and negatives to the Huntington Library to be permanently cared for.

In 2014 the entire remaining collection of papers, photographs, maps, books and three-dimensional items, after the 50-year residency in Highland Park, began its transient journey from one leased public storage unit to another, except for its two-year stay at the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum in the City of Industry.



Delivery day, September 12, 2018, with Christian Rodriguez, Curator of El Alisal, and then-Society Executive Director Amy Essington overseeing the transfer. (Photos by Betty Uyeda)



Donations were placed into the rented freezer.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ITEMS AT THE SEAVER CENTER?

Certificate of Andres Pico, as an aid to California Governor as Colonel of Cavalry, 1852

Certificate issued by the Los Angeles City Council on the passing of Fred Eaton, 1934

Diary of C.W. Jenkins from the Civil War, 1865

Documents for Catalina Island, granted by Pio Pico to Thomas Robbins, 1846-50

A handwritten letter, from surveyor George Hansen to surveyor William Moore, 1888

Map of Church Property, the Bishop Amat Tract (later the site of St. Vibiana Cathedral), 1866

Photo album for the 1933 Long Beach earthquake

Photo portrait albums, "Pioneer Society of Los Angeles County," volumes 1 and 2 by Edwards-Hostetter Studio



A processing grant has been awarded by the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. The photograph items are the first to be undertaken by Collections Manager Kim Walters. (Photo by Chris Coleman)



Nearly 3,000 photographs once used by the Herald Examiner newspaper include more than 350 combined of aviators Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. (Photo by Chris Coleman)

The institutional records of the Society are among the donated materials. Past members represented include John C. Austin, architect and president of the Society; Edward Dickson, longtime trustee of UCLA; the Dockweiler family; James Miller Guinn; Frank B. Houghton; Marco Newmark; Marion Parks; Ana Begue de Packman; and Charles Prudhomme.

In accordance with notices published in the daily newspapers of Los Angeles City, requesting those interested in forming an Historical Society for Southern California, to meet at the City Court room at 7½ o'clock P.M. November 1st 1883. The following named gentlemen assembled.

Col. J. J. Warner. H. S. Barrows. Gen John Mansfield, Maj. C. A. Wilson, Gen John S. Downey, J. M. Guinn, George Hansen Ira More, J. B. Niles, A Kohler, A. F. Coronel, A. J. Bradfield, St. Leveing Edward, W. Jones and Marcus Baker.

Above is the first written entry in the minutes book of the Society.

UNCOMMON CANNONS

by Beth Werling

Prior to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), Los Angeles had little need for artillery, which makes the two light cannons donated by the Historical Society of Southern California such rarities. The two, one bronze and the other made of iron, were probably manufactured in Mexico City in the late 18th or early 19th century when Los Angeles was part of Spain, and then Mexico. Based on similar surviving examples, they appear to follow the utilitarian lines of the English cannon which was a popular style at the time. Smaller cannons such as these were used to protect presidios and other outposts rather than to serve as field artillery in battle.

These two cannons were part of a trio uncovered in 1912 by a County road crew when constructing a bridge on Broadway over the Eaton Wash, near today's Rosemead Boulevard. The theory is that *Californios* had buried them to prevent invading American military troops from confiscating them as booty when they captured Los Angeles in early 1847. After their discovery, the three cannons were purchased for \$75 by a local collector, Walter Temple, who donated one of the cannons to the San Gabriel Mission where it remains today. The remaining two he sold years later in 1930 to

nursery owner Edward Rust, who in turn sold them in 1939 to the Society.

The Natural History Museum was please when the Society reached out asking if we could provide a permanent home to these significant *California* artifacts.



The longer one of the two cannons shown is approximately 4 feet. Image courtesy of History Department/Material Culture (Photo by Beth Werling)



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