



Los Angeles City HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, Issue 3 • Fall 2019

Yellow Cars and Red Cars

by John E. Fisher

THE RED CARS AND YELLOW CARS comprised the world's largest inter-urban railroad system and shaped Southern California in the early part of the 20th century. Both were the entrepreneurial efforts of Henry Huntington.

Henry was the nephew of Collis P. Huntington, who helped develop the Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1895, Henry developed the first segment of the Los Angeles Railway (LARy), a narrow gauge (3' 6") line. The original line ran from Downtown Los Angeles to Pasadena. LARy provided mostly local service to the developed communities and business districts adjacent to and near Downtown Los Angeles. The cars were painted yellow and generally operated in the middle of streets where patrons would board from narrow islands within the street.

Henry Huntington then proceeded to develop the Pacific Electric Railway (PERy). Huntington purchased 72 separate local lines, most of them with narrow gauge track. He rebuilt them to standard gauge (4' 8½") track and reassembled and extended them during the first decade of the 20th century. The first Red Car line began operation in 1902 along Long Beach Avenue and Willowbrook Avenue, the alignment of today's Metro Blue Line. Red Cars generally ran in exclusive rights-of-way, although some lines operated within streets.

During its heyday, LARy covered 316 miles of track, while the PERy covered 1,164 miles, reaching from the San Fernando Valley on the north to Balboa on the south and from Santa Monica on the west to Redlands on the east. This rail network encouraged and shaped the growth of hundreds of communities in Southern California. Together,



ca. 1950 • City bus and Red Car.
Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

the local and regional rail transportation systems covered nearly 1,500 miles, the most extensive system in the nation.

Patronage on the Red Cars rose to a peak of 109 million annual passengers in 1924. However, ten years

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THE LOS ANGELES CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S 2020 GALA will be held March 8, 2020

at the historic Dunbar Hotel on Central Avenue in Los Angeles. Independent historian and author Alison Rose Jefferson will be our speaker. Click on the link below for information about her recent book,

Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era.

<http://alisonrosejefferson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/JEFFERSON.pdf>

Please stay tuned for additional details!



President’s Message

FALL 2019

Greetings Everyone!

THE YEAR 2019 WAS OUR FIRST AWARDING SCHOLARSHIPS through our scholarship fund, and the program was a big success. We made six awards to two students each from the Cal State Universities of Los Angeles, Northridge, and Long Beach for advanced undergraduate or graduate level research on Southern California history. We also held our annual membership meeting in September and were able to provide a forum for several of the awardees to present their topics to the board and our membership in the Pico House at El Pueblo. Topics included Mexican food in Los Angeles; Iowan “Hawkeye” migration to Long Beach; the punk rock scene in Huntington Beach; social protest at Cal State LA; and a comparative study of the Progressive Campaign of 1948 with the Peace and Freedom Campaign of 1968. The presentations were well-received by those in attendance, and I think this will become our annual tradition to have our scholarship

awardees present at the annual meeting.

By the time you read this, we will have participated in the 14th annual Archival Bazaar at the USC Doheny Library. Many of you may have stopped by our table. If not, please consider checking out the Archival Bazaar next year; it is a great resource for learning about and meeting historical groups in Southern California.

I hope you and your families are all looking forward to the holiday season. This past year we held our annual gala in March, and we plan to continue that in years to come. Our 2020 gala will be at the historic Dunbar hotel on Central Avenue in Los Angeles, and there will be more information on that to come.

Take care over the busy holiday season, and I hope to see you all at our events and lectures!

Sincerely,

Todd Gaydowski, President

Volume 39, Issue 3 Fall 2019

Los Angeles City Historical Society
Founded 1976

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Maria Siciliano, Editor
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Design by Amy Inouye, Future Studio

LACHS

P.O. Box 862311
Los Angeles, CA 90086-2311
<https://www.lacityhistory.org>

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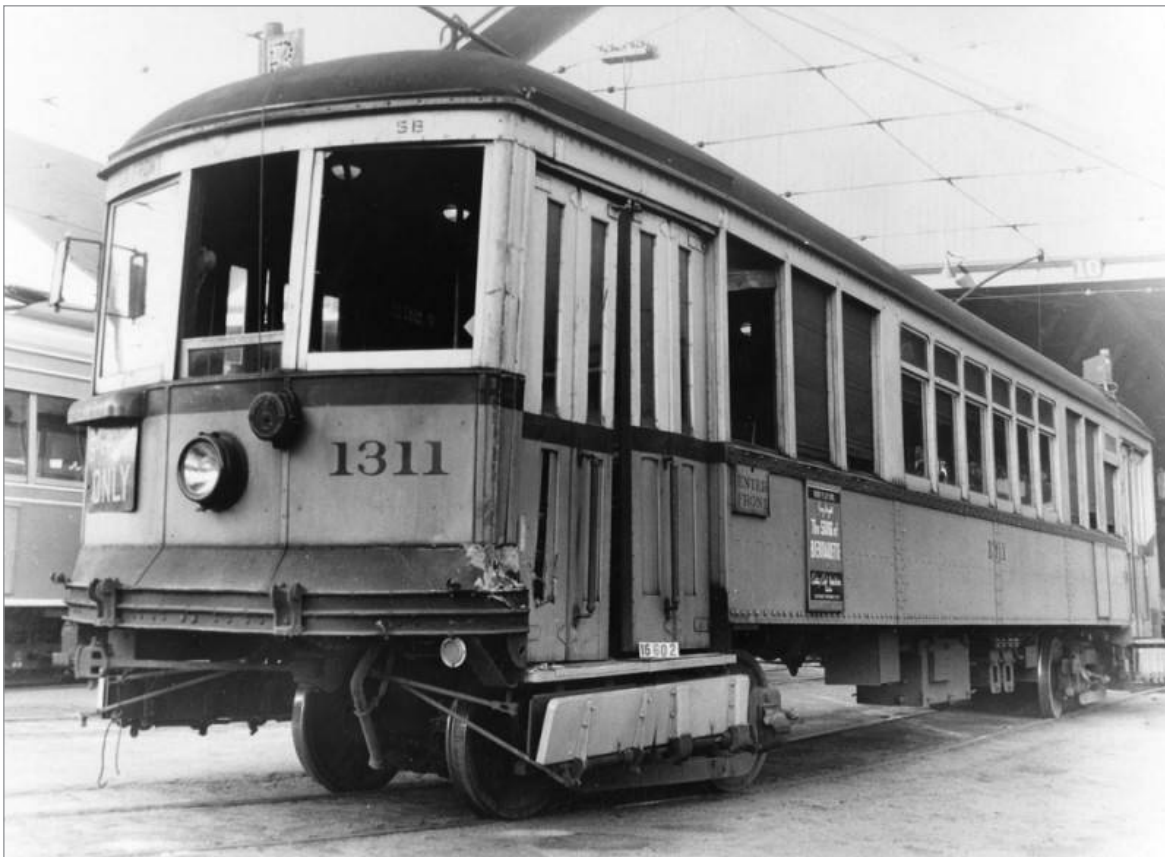
YELLOW CARS AND RED CARS, *continued from page 1*

later it had declined to just 54 million, less than half of the peak patronage. During World War II, patronage rose again in response to gasoline and tire rationing. It declined sharply after the War.

In 1945, Los Angeles Railway was sold to National City Lines which marketed the service as Los Angeles Transit Lines. The last Yellow Car made its final trip on March 31, 1963. In 1953, Pacific Electric Railway was sold to Metropolitan Coach Lines. The last of the Red Cars made its final run in the Spring of 1961 along the Long Beach line where it had started 59 years earlier. In 1958, the private transit systems became publicly operated under the new Metropolitan Transit Authority, which would be succeeded by the Southern California Rapid Transit District, the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, and finally the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

It would be three decades later before rail transit would have a renaissance in Los Angeles. ♦

Right: Angelenos jam Pacific Electric Red Cars. While "Yellow Line" wheels are silenced by strike, P.E. trains are now packed to capacity. May 8, 1946 passenger jam. *Herald Examiner* Collection, Los Angeles Public Library



Yellow Car. Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

When Incinerators Last in the Backyard Burned

by Abraham Hoffman

YOU MAY STILL FIND A FEW in some neglected backyards, relics made ancient by the curious time-warp that is Los Angeles history. After more than sixty years, the backyard incinerator is but a memory for old-timers, and a subject of disbelief for the present generation. “You mean people burned their own trash in their own incinerator in their own backyards? You’ve got to be kidding!”

The backyard incinerator was a monument to the time when southern California was innocent of environmental impact reports, when the Hollywood Freeway ended at Vineland, when there was no Sports Arena, Forum, Staples Center or Dodger Stadium. The tallest building on the horizon was the Los Angeles City Hall. And local government left the question of trash disposal to the homeowners of the region. People burned their milk cartons, yesterday’s newspapers, empty cereal boxes, and other combustible rubbish in their own personal incinerators. The City of Los Angeles collected only the trash that would not burn—

the empty tin cans, the bottles, the garbage—and the ashes from the home incinerators. Blue, green, and black barrels were not even on the distant horizon for the future.

Then in February 1955, the Air Pollution Control District (forerunner of the Air Quality Management District), in investigating the various theories and causes of air pollution, proposed banning backyard incinerators in Los Angeles County. The idea first met with opposition and delaying tactics. As one observer noted, “It has long been a ritual here on fine lazy mornings to lay trash in the mouth of this blackened idol and send a partly burnt offering into the sky.”

But too many worshippers had helped foul the air, so the APCD, backed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, gave the word: no more backyard incinerator use after September 1957, and offenders could expect fines of up to \$500 or six months in jail. To ease the pain of adjustment, the supervisors approved a temporary

transition period permitting trash burning after 4 p.m. The coils of smoke rising into the atmosphere after that hour provided visual confirmation for those who had insisted that the home incinerators had indeed been contributing to the smog problem.

The City of Los Angeles had made municipal pickup of noncombustible refuse an accepted fact of life since 1917, but combustible items had been left to everyone’s personal incinerators. The question of whether the city should also collect the new addition to the rubbish heap became a political issue in the 1957 municipal election. “The city can pick up rubbish along with tin cans and garbage at a monthly cost of approximately 40 cents per residence,”

declared Mayor Norris Poulson. “It can be financed out of the present city budget without additional funds.” Poulson accused supporters of private collection of being part of a “rubbish syndicate” that would charge up to five dollars a month for collection of combustible trash.

Appearing on the April 2nd ballot was Proposition A, asking voters to approve municipal collection of their milk cartons, bags, boxes, papers, and whatever else could go up in smoke. The city’s citizens expressed their will, reelecting Poulson and endorsing Proposition A by a four-to-one margin. The city immediately set up a program for



Death knell for burners Oct. 1, 1957.
Valley Times Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

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BACKYARD INCINERATORS, *continued from page 4*

combustible rubbish collection.

Some parts of the City of Los Angeles were already involved in municipal rubbish collection. The city began phasing in the program in December 1955, and by 1957 had already acquired some of the additional collection trucks needed for the task. Meanwhile, fifteen other cities in Los Angeles County instituted combustible rubbish collection; another thirty contracted with private collectors. About a dozen cities chose not to create a plan, leaving it up to their residents to make their own arrangements with private trash collectors. In unincorporated county areas, garbage collectors were instructed to pick up burnable trash—at an additional charge to homeowner tax bills.

As the October 1st deadline neared, county government made sure that everyone would observe the ban. More than a hundred APCD inspectors went on the alert to look for possible violators. Some parts of the county, however, were exempt for the time being because of their sparse population: the west end of the San Fernando Valley outside the Los Angeles city limits, Malibu, and the Antelope Valley. Catalina Island was also exempt from the ban. Some owners unsuccessfully protested against the ban.

On October 1st, with the ban in effect, the backyard incinerator became an instant museum piece, gone the way of electric streetcars and outhouses. The Junior Chamber of Commerce staged a mock funeral for the backyard incinerators, burying a “Smokey Joe,” a make-believe incinerator (see photo on page 6). “The only trouble with the usual Smokey Joe is that he doesn’t disappear that easily,” observed the *Los Angeles Times*. A few homeowners simply left the obsolete incinerator sitting in the backyard, perhaps leaving it for a future purchaser of the home to deal with it.

Suggestions abounding on what to do with the incinerators included making them into “king-sized flowerpots,” or perhaps birdbaths. Los Angeles city officials recommended a more practical idea: bashing

the incinerators into small pieces with a sledgehammer. Warren A. Schneider, director of the Bureau of Sanitation, promised that the concrete pieces, if put in a five-gallon can, would be collected by the city. The iron doors and grates would also be picked up.

Some people did not get the message right away. On October 2nd, the APCD warned eighteen people who were still using their Smokey Joes to desist unless they wanted to be fined and jailed. More than a hundred people called the APCD to ask if they could burn trash in their fireplaces (the answer was no) or use inside incinerators (no again) and what to do with the outlawed incinerators.



1954 • Backyard incinerator ban, *Herald Examiner* Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

To collect the trash, the City of Los Angeles purchased 178 refuse collection vehicles, at a 1957 cost of almost two million dollars. After extensive tests and bidding, the contract was awarded to International Harvester for its Leach Packmaster chassis, rear-loading, mechanical-packing vehicles. Each truck could load twenty cubic yards of trash. The trucks had right-hand drive, reducing the potential for curbside accidents. The total fleet came to 245 city trucks and a budget of \$3 million, including the salaries of 500

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BACKYARD INCINERATORS, *continued from page 5*

trash collectors. Bureau of Sanitation Director Schneider assured city residents that the cost of the added service would come from general tax funds, with no direct charge to residents.

Collection of combustible rubbish meant that now cities such as Los Angeles would have to make separate collections for garbage and burnable trash. Housewives objected to the requirement that garbage and combustible rubbish be packaged separately. Moreover, collecting two types of refuse on separate days did not appear to be an economical practice. In 1961, Samuel W. Yorty found trash collection a handy issue in his race for the mayor's office. He ridiculed the burden housewives had in separating one kind of trash from another. This argument, as well as the controversy over the land for Dodger Stadium, helped Yorty win the race for mayor. For the next twenty years, people put all their trash together, ran garbage disposals to be rid of leftover food, and ignored warnings about landfills reaching capacity.

By the 1980s, environmentalists were harshly criticizing the practice of putting all kinds of trash in one container. Ecologically-conscious individuals were separating their

trash, faithfully recycling aluminum cans, newspapers, and glass bottles for school and other fundraising programs. Then, more than thirty years after deciding on a one-container method of trash disposal, Los Angeles had second thoughts. As the state imposed a cost on plastic and glass bottles and aluminum cans to encourage recycling, the city created a program of providing large trash barrels for residents to separate their trash once again. This time, the "housewives of Los Angeles" raised no complaint.

Long gone from the scene, the backyard incinerator serves as a reminder of the belief that air pollution might be curtailed through its banishment. Unfortunately, while the incinerators are gone, smog is still with us (though much improved), and the landfills are still running out of room. Meanwhile, homeowners generally cooperate with putting the right stuff into blue, black, and green barrels on their appointed days. It should be noted the barrels are not free; check the Department of Water and Power bill, actually a municipal services bill, and you will see a fee charged for those barrels. And lest anyone attempt to put excess garbage into the blue recyclable barrel, be advised that the city has inspectors who periodically prowl the residential streets, poking their heads into the blue barrels in search of such offenders. ♦



1957 • Smokey Joe heading for the last roundup, *Herald Examiner* Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

The Visiting Ladies of 1909

by Geraldine Knatz

THESE DAYS WHEN YOU LEAVE A CONFERENCE or convention, the first thing you discard is your name badge. Who wants to be caught with a lariat around one's neck or a big card pinned to one's chest displaying one's name? Not so, 100 years ago. Convention goers would be decked out with pins, pinbacks, ribbons, and watch fobs to commemorate their attendance at an event.

Often well made, these pieces of ephemera have stood the test of time and help us imagine the life of a conventioneer in Los Angeles over a century ago. The discovery of a "Visiting Ladies, Los Angeles 1909" pin with an elk head on it was a tip off that this pin would have adorned the dress of women who accompanied a man attending the Fraternal Order of the Elks 1909 convention in Los Angeles. The convention was hosted by Elks Lodge No. 99, located in downtown Los Angeles.

What a convention this was! Thousands of people came in by special trains from across the country. Delegations from other states spent thousands of dollars to adorn floats for the grand parade, representing

Elks Lodge No. 99 had both a main building and an annex. The annex was the old Crocker Mansion, at the corner of Olive and Third Street, the former stately home of the Crocker banking family. The structural issues associated with the building had been known for some time and the Elks purchased the building for \$65,000, aware of its faults. About a year before the convention, the Elks hoped to remodel the building but engineers advised them to tear the mansion down and build a concrete-reinforced structure. The new Elks building opened in May 1909, just in the time for the convention.

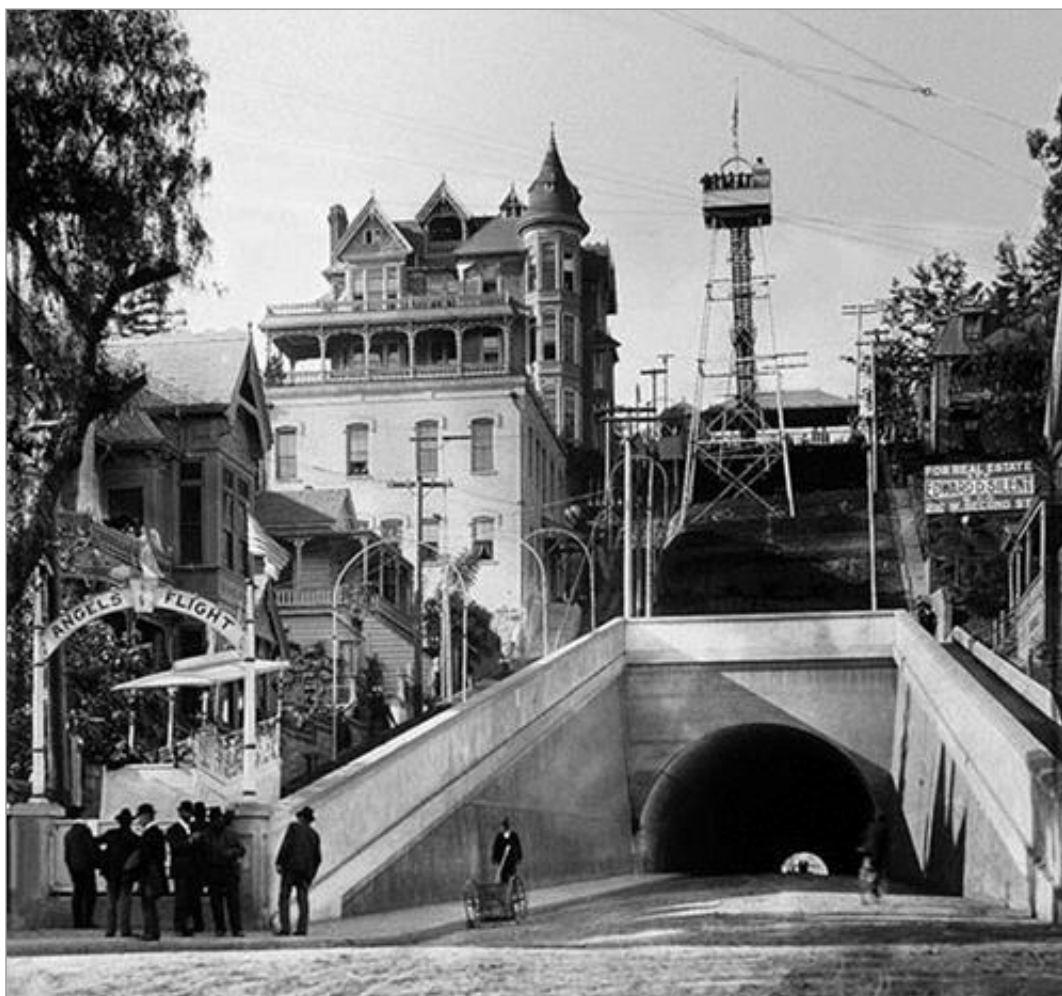


their home state lodges. The parade would rival the Rose Parade. Some delegates even endured a long sea voyage to attend – the five delegates from the Philippines, representing the 500 members of the Elks in Manila, were lauded for traveling the farthest.

The conventioners traveled throughout the region seeing the sites the Los Angeles area had to offer. A "Long Beach Day"

during the convention boasted the largest crowd ever in that city – 35,000. Three and four car trains were leaving Los Angeles every three to four minutes to head to Long Beach. By noon, all the bathing suits to rent were gone as

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THE VISITING LADIES OF 1909, *continued from page 7*

5,000 people played in the surf. Everyone proudly wore their badges, and badge-swapping between lodge members was in full swing.

Fortunately for the Elks Lodge No. 99, its building or

“temple” was directly adjacent to the Los Angeles Incline Railway, also known as Angel’s Flight. A passenger record was set during the one-week convention that began on July 11th and ended on July 17th – Angel’s Flight handled 60,000 passengers that week! ♦



The new Elks Building built at the site of the Crocker Mansion atop Bunker Hill. Photo from Department of Water and Power Associates.



A postcard showing Angel’s Flight and the Elks Lodge No. 99 sign towering over the top of the Bunker Hill.

Attention “Elks”
Pat. May 25th, 1909.





The last Grand Lodge meeting of the Elks, here in Los Angeles, showed what a great assistance it was to ladies to wear an emblem of the order. Official badges were issued to the visiting ladies during the recent convention. There has been a great demand for the above brooches since that time. Every Elk is pleased to see a mother, wife, daughter or ‘sister wear this brooch. The shield is an emblem of protection, and is therefore very appropriate for the design. These brooches are made in solid gold. No 1 is enameled to conform in colors to the U. S. Shield; No. 2 is a broad shield at the bottom. No. 2 and No. 3 are made in bright rose or Roman gold. The price of these brooches, Nos. 1 and 2, is \$10.00 each. No. 3 is \$8.00 each. When ladies order by mail they must give name and number of lodge to which father, husband, brother or son belongs, as a complete record is kept of all the brooches sold, as they will be sold to Elks’ relatives only. Sent by registered mail on receipt of price, or sent C.O.D. by express, subject to examination. Address all mail orders to

V. A. GREEN
P. O. BOX 96, LOS ANGELES, CAL.

<p>They are for sale by the following jewelers in Los Angeles, Cal.</p> <p>Carl Entermann Jewelry Co., 217 1/2 South Spring Street. Geo. L. Rannister, 306 South Spring Street.</p>	<p>J. Abramson, 404 South Broadway. A. E. Morro, 400 South Broadway. Donavan & Seaman’s Co., 252-255 South Spring Street.</p>
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Advertisement from the *Los Angeles Times*

A Blast in the Night: The Bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* Building

by Richard Ross

TODAY, IT MAY SEEM as if we live in a time of constant threat of terrorist attacks, but domestic terrorism is actually nothing new in the United States.

The early years of the 20th century were marked often by violent struggles between labor unions and management. The workers's demands for better working conditions and payment had spread from Europe to America. Employers used paid provocateurs, spies, private police companies (such as the Pinkerton National Detective Agency), and strike breakers, sometimes assisted or enabled by law enforcement, to bust the unions. Some of the union organizers responded to the brutality with their own brand of violence. Between 1906 and 1911, union militants set off 110 bombs. One of their primary targets was the *Los Angeles Times* building.

At 1:07 a.m. on the morning of October 1, 1910, a powerful bomb exploded in an alley outside the *Los Angeles Times* Building at First Street and Broadway. The bomb blast and subsequent fire destroyed the 3-story building and the printing press building next door.

At the time of the blast, about 115 employees were working the graveyard shift putting together the morning edition of the newspaper. There is still some debate as to the actual number of victims, but at least 20 were killed and 100 injured.

The bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building, dubbed "The Crime of the Century," was the tragic culmination of a bitter labor struggle between union organizers and the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, Harrison Gray Otis.

Otis, a decorated veteran of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, had run the *Times* since 1882 and was virulently opposed to labor unions. A staunch conservative, he used the *Times* to inveigh against the "evils" of organized labor.

One of the largest unions at that time was the Iron



1910 • *Los Angeles Times* building after bombing.
Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

Workers Union. The union had suffered setbacks from the anti-union campaign led by Otis and the *Times*.

On June 1, 1910, the Iron Workers Union had struck in an effort to secure a \$.50 per hour minimum wage and overtime pay. Otis, who controlled the local Merchants and Manufacturing Association, used his newspaper to crush the unionization. Despite Otis having pushed through a local ordinance banning picketing and "speaking in public streets in a loud or unusual tone," the union movement thrived and grew throughout Los Angeles.

Then, during the early morning hours of October 1, the calm of the night was torn by the explosion. The bomb – consisting of 16 sticks of dynamite in a suitcase wired to an alarm clock – destroyed one wall of the brick and granite building and ignited gas lines, causing a fire which consumed the entire building and the building next door which housed the printing press.

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BLAST IN THE NIGHT, *continued from page 9*

Later that morning, two other bombs were found hidden in the bushes outside the homes of publisher Otis and Felix J. Zeehandelaar, the head of a Los Angeles business organization. Their timing mechanisms had jammed.

The Iron Workers Union condemned the bombing and denied that any of its members were responsible for the blast, but Otis was convinced that union activists were connected to the bombing and vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice.



1910 • *Los Angeles Times* building after bombing.
Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

Weeks passed, however, without any arrests being made, despite a \$25,000 reward offered by the city and another \$50,000 raised by the Merchants and Manufacturing Association.

Los Angeles Mayor George Alexander hired private detective William J. Burns, known as “The Sherlock Holmes of America,” to track down the perpetrators. An informant working for Burns in the Iron Workers Union disclosed that the bombing campaign had been orchestrated by union member Ortie McManigal.

According to the informant, a union activist named James B. McNamara had carried out the actual bombing. His brother J.J. McNamara was the secretary of the union

and had helped procure funds and materials for the bombing. Supposedly, James McNamara had bragged about his role in the bombing during a hunting trip.

Burns tracked McManigal and James McNamara to a Detroit hotel and had them arrested on April 14, 1911, six months after the bombing. Police found dynamite, blasting caps, and alarm clocks in their suitcases.

The two men were taken to Chicago and held for a week without bail in the private home of a Chicago police officer. Burns convinced McManigal to testify against his co-conspirators in return for a lighter prison sentence.

McManigal claimed that he had not been directly involved with the bombing but that it had been carried out by James McNamara and two other men, Matthew Schmidt and David Caplan. On April 22, Burns and local police took J.J. McNamara into custody and – without any legal authority – took him along with James McNamara and McManigal to Los Angeles.

Union leaders immediately leapt to the defense of the three men, declaring that they were innocent and had been unlawfully kidnapped by Burns and the authorities. They claimed that the three men had been framed. Some sympathizers, including Socialist Party activist Eugene V. Debs, even accused Otis himself of bombing his own facility in order to smear the labor movement. In Los Angeles, Mayor Alexander was in a very close re-election campaign against Socialist Party candidate Job Harriman, which only added to the turmoil.

Defense attorneys claimed that the explosion had been an accident caused by a gas leak and that there had in fact been no dynamite. Any other evidence, such as the other bombs found the next morning, they claimed had been planted by police as part of a frame-up.

To bolster their chances in court, the Iron Workers Union brought in famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow. Darrow, today best known for his involvement with the Leopold and Loeb murder trial and the so-called Scopes “Monkey Trial,” was the most famous defense lawyer of his day and a progressive activist, sympathetic to the goals of organized labor. Darrow, however, suspected that the McNamara brothers were guilty. In the end, he reluctantly agreed to take on the case as lead attorney with Job Harriman, the Socialist Party candidate for mayor.

The McNamara brothers were arraigned and pled

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BLAST IN THE NIGHT, *continued from page 10*

not guilty on May 5, 1911. McManigal had turned state's evidence and was not charged at that time.

Journalist Lincoln Steffens covered the trial and – though he too suspected that the McNamaras were probably guilty – argued that their actions had been justified by the violent repression exerted by the employers and law enforcement. Darrow helped cobble together a deal wherein the McNamaras would receive a lighter prison sentence in return for backing off a disruptive strike and organizing efforts against the employers. Before the deal was finalized, however, Darrow was accused of attempted bribery of a juror.

On December 1, 1911, the McNamara brothers changed their pleas to guilty. James McNamara admitted having set the bomb that destroyed the *Los Angeles Times* building. John McNamara admitted to having ordered the bombing of another building, the Llewellyn Iron Works.

In his confession read in court during his sentencing hearing, James McNamara stated, *“On the night of September 30, 1910, at 5:45 p.m., I placed in Ink Alley, a portion of the Times building, a suitcase containing sixteen sticks of 80 per cent dynamite, set to explode at one o'clock the next morning. It was my intention to injure the building and scare the owners. I sincerely regret that these unfortunate men lost their lives. If the giving of my life would bring them back I would gladly give it.”*

The judge did not accept McNamara's contention that he did not intend to harm any workers at the *Times*. *“A man who would put sixteen sticks of... dynamite in a building,”* he stated, *“in which you, as a printer, knew gas was burning in many places, and in which you knew there were scores of human beings toiling, must have no regard whatever for the lives of his fellow beings. He must have been*

a murderer at heart.”

The McNamara brothers were both spared the death penalty. Instead, John McNamara was sentenced to 15 years in prison, and James McNamara received a life sentence. James spent the rest of his life in prison, dying there of cancer on March 9, 1941. His brother, John, served nine years. After John's release, he continued to work for the union but was convicted of threatening to destroy buildings and later fired for embezzling \$200 from union funds. He spent the rest of his life doing odd jobs and died on May 8, 1941, two months after his brother.

Ortie McManigal served two and a half years in prison before being released on parole.

Clarence Darrow was indicted on two charges of jury tampering. Darrow was acquitted in the first trial, and the second trial resulted in a hung jury.

Darrow's co-counsel, Job Harriman, was defeated by Mayor Alexander in a landslide loss on December 5, 1911.



1910 • *Los Angeles Times* building after bombing.
Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

The turmoil associated with the bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building marked the decline and end of the Los Angeles labor movement. Employers renewed their efforts to break the unions, and by 1912, the local labor movement had essentially collapsed.

In 1935, a new home for the *Los Angeles Times* was opened at the corner of 1st and Spring Streets. The art deco *Los Angeles Times* building was a local landmark for more than 83 years. In 2018, the *Times* announced it was relocating its headquarters to El Segundo.

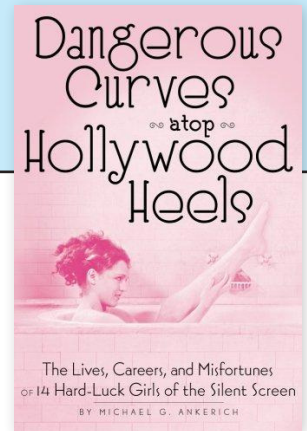
The *Los Angeles Times* building, despite its historic and architectural significance, is not listed as a historical landmark. It is currently slated for re-development.

A monument in Hollywood Forever Cemetery commemorates the victims of the *Times* building bombing.



BOOK
REVIEWS

DANGEROUS CURVES ATOP HOLLYWOOD HEELS: *The Lives, Careers, and Misfortunes of the Hard-Luck Girls of the Silent Screen*, by Michael G. Ankerich. Atlanta: BearManor Media, 2015. 407 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Filmography, Index. Paper, \$26.95.



IGNORE THE SEMI-SALACIOUS INNUENDOS of the title; this book is really about its subtitle. Michael Ankerich examines the careers of fourteen actresses who gained fame as movie stars in the 1920s only to meet premature death or a subsequent lifetime of obscurity and poverty. Ankerich points out that his book does not include Thelma Todd, Jean Harlow, Peggy Entwistle, and others who have been written about extensively. His focus is on women who are virtually forgotten except for diehard movie fans. Most of the films in which they appeared were silent films, and, except for a possible sighting on TCM's "Silent Sunday Nights," the pictures are either lost or inaccessible, not on DVD or VHS or YouTube, with a few exceptions.

Most of the actresses described in this book died in their 40s or earlier, the result of alcoholism, drug addiction, the stress of multiple marriages and divorces, or debilitating scandals. There are a few exceptions: Natalie Joyce walked away from her movie career rather than be caught up in the wild ride, the "dangerous curves" of vice and scandalous behavior. Her cousin Olive Borden, however, in poor health, died in poverty at age 41 at the Sunshine Mission for Women and Children. Lucille Rickson, at the peak of a career that promised greater success, died at age sixteen of a mysterious illness that was never clearly diagnosed. And Martha Mansfield died in a freak accident when her dress caught fire while the final scenes of her picture were being filmed.

The rest of the women in this book—Agnes Ayres, Grace Darmond, Elinor Fair, Juanita Hanson, Wanda Hawley, Barbara La Marr, Mary Nolan, Marie Prevost, Eve Southern, and Alberta Vaughan—share similar biographies. Working-class or impoverished childhoods, the trip to

Hollywood, a usual (but not for all) rise to fame and wealth as movie stars, followed by a decline as their stars dimmed with age, weight gain, drug addictions, lots of alcohol, and some bad choices in husbands and lovers.

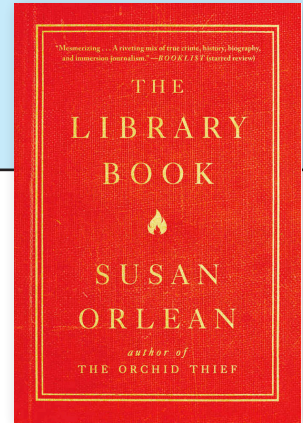
Ankerich pays some attention to the work environment of these actresses and the pressures put upon them to remain eternally young and beautiful so that box office receipts would keep the studios profitable, but he does not focus broadly, barely mentioning the Hayes Office or the more notorious scandals that plagued Hollywood in the early 1920s. In fact, the word "Prohibition" is never mentioned even though the Prohibition coincided almost exactly with the period covered in this book. The studios where they worked remain in a shadowy background, making it difficult to determine the degree to which they supported the antics of these actresses or whether the actresses earned some of that "hard luck" through bad choices of their own making.

There are additional shortcomings of the book, including more than a few typographical and spelling errors, poor grammar, and occasional factual errors (Mary Nolan died at age 42 on page 254 and at age 46 on page 272). In spite of its deficits, this book will interest both students of silent film history and anyone interested in reading about a bygone era of Hollywood filmmaking. ♦

Abraham Hoffman teaches history at Los Angeles Valley College.

**BOOK
REVIEWS**

THE LIBRARY BOOK, by Susan Orlean. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018. 321 pp. Illustrations, Note on Sources. Hardbound, \$28.



FULL DISCLOSURE: from March 1956 to June 1961—a month after I started graduate studies for a master’s degree in history—I was employed as a messenger clerk in the Periodicals Department (later reorganized as General Reading Services) at the Los Angeles Central Library. While working there, I was able to secure employment for several friends, including my brother, when messenger clerk jobs were vacant. My brother in turn alerted some of his friends to job openings there. One of them, Eddie Itagaki, continued working there for many years after I had left to become a school teacher.

Over the years I visited the library as my research needs included valuable source materials there, and in the 1980s my students at Franklin High School in Highland Park made good use of the library, a short distance down the Pasadena Freeway—until April 29, 1986, when a fire broke out at the library and closed it down for the next six years.

Susan Orlean has written a book that is part love affair with the Central Library, part history, and part detective work in attempting to discover the identity of the arsonist who allegedly started the fire that destroyed 400,000 books and damaged hundreds of thousands more. Orlean’s book evidences a life-long appreciation of books, libraries, and librarians. She also provides a narrative on the library’s history from its first incarnation in 1872 to the present day. As for the alleged arsonist (no one was ever convicted of the crime, and there’s an argument by some that there was no crime at all), she assesses the role of Harry Peak, a young man who confessed to the crime, then denied any involvement in starting a fire, and changed his testimony innumerable times, to the frustration of prosecutors, defense attorneys, and Orlean herself.

Orlean’s narrative is at its best when she describes the most likely course the fire took from its inception to an almost uncontrollable firestorm. She interweaves this tragic episode in Los Angeles history with her own recollections of a childhood immersed in books and library visits, her attempts to discover the “real” Harry Peak, and how the Central Library evolved from a small collection to the design and construction of the building that was completed in 1926. She provides biographical sketches of librarians in

charge of the library and its branches, including Charles F. Lummis, Mary Foy, Mary Jones, Althea Warren, and others.

It is this tracing of the library’s history that forms the weakest part of the book. In focusing on librarians as principal characters, she makes almost no mention of the classified staff—the worker bees who worked in the offices mostly out of the public eye, sorting, retrieving, filing books and periodicals, or the maintenance crews who repaired broken shelves, did carpentry work, replaced burned out light bulbs, and performed many other tasks. Of note is the absence of Joe Brito, who began his career at the library as a carpenter in 1941, returned there after serving in the Army in World War II, and rose through the ranks to become Chief Buildings Maintenance Foreman for the Central Library and its branches, in 1953.

Brito carried the keys to every door of the Central Library as well as all of its branches, keeping them on a huge ring. On occasion, the Los Angeles Police Department would contact him when a report came in of a burglary at one of the branches. He would bring his key ring and open the door, knowing the proper key among the large collection on the ring. He retired in 1985. His son, Frank Brito, worked at the library as a messenger clerk in the Foreign Language Department, and we became life-long friends.

Although a nonfiction work, this book lacks an index and end notes, and the bibliography is only three pages. Some errors crept in: Tom Owen (not Owens) spent his long career at the Central Library as a clerk typist with an encyclopedic knowledge of California history, the go-to person for anyone doing research in state and local history. The LACHS created the J. Thomas Owen History Award in his honor. Regarding Charles F. Lummis’s numerous extramarital affairs, he could not have seduced Aimee Semple McPherson during his tenure as city librarian since she was not in California at that time (p. 141). Orlean omits the fact that Fatty Arbuckle was acquitted of the

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infamous murder charge, though the publicity ruined his career.

In her interview with the library head of security, David Aguirre, it is noted that 26 security guards are assigned to the Central Library and some of its branches. In 1956, the library had exactly one security guard, and he spent most of his time at the nearby San Carlos Hotel bar. When he retired, six officers were hired to replace him, giving the library a 600% increase in security.

Although falling short of a full-scale history of the library, this is a delightful book as the reader will become involved in the author’s search for the alleged arsonist

and the many lively anecdotes about the quirks of the building—and the quirks of the librarians and patrons who worked and visited there. One other detail: Until the mid-1960s, the library provided a haven of sorts for the senior citizens who lived in nearby hotels and boarding houses on Bunker Hill, until urban renewal destroyed the houses and buildings on the hill. Today, the library provides many services to Los Angeles residents, including adult literacy programs, low-vision service centers, and citizenship and financial literacy classes, among others. ♦

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