



Sierra Madre Historical Preservation Society

Fall 2020 Newsletter



Sierra Madre's First Post Office

Here is a delightful first-person account of the founding of our post office, written by one of our earliest settlers, the wife of the first Postmaster, Mrs. E.T. Pierce. But first, a little introductory information.

"Professor E.T. Pierce was not only Sierra Madre's first Postmaster, but Sierra Madre's first teacher. In 1881 he brought his family to Sierra Madre where he had purchased 20 acres of land. He divided his parcel in half by putting through Highland Avenue. This property was located at the northeast corner of Central and Sierra Madre Blvd. (now Sierra Madre Blvd and Michillinda)." Sierra Madre Vistas; A Pictorial History of Sierra Madre Compiled and Edited by Elizabeth P. Keith, published by the Sierra Madre Historical Society

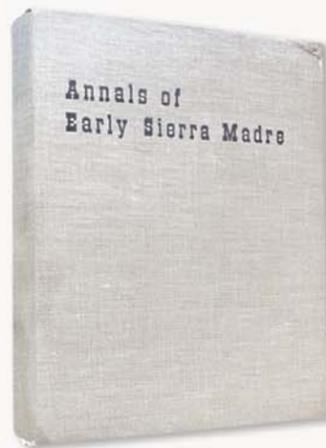


Edward T. Pierce, the first Postmaster

Sierra Madre Archives

"Sierra Madre rose on the decomposed granite outwash plain.... Except in the northern boundary areas and canyon entrances where trails and streams issued from the mountains, the land did not have much tree cover. Huge spreading oaks dominated here and there, but it was mostly carpeted with a pungent chaparral mix: sagebrush, sumac, greasewood, poison oak and native grasses." – Michele Zack, in her *Southern California Story; Seeking the Better Life in Sierra Madre.*

(Mrs. Pierce's account begins on page 3)



Why Annals hasn't been published yet

Why Hasn't the 1950 Annals of Early Sierra Madre Been Re-published Yet?

Our history article in this newsletter, "Sierra Madre's First Post Office," is a wonderful excerpt from one of the many first-person accounts of the very early days of Sierra Madre which can be found in *Annals*, an old publication of the Sierra Madre Historical Society. It gives you a glimpse of what fascinating stories can be found in its pages.

At some time after 1950, the entire book was photocopied and reissued with a spiral binding, but after that, no copies were available for purchase.

We felt that the book was too much of a treasure not to be published again to delight a new audience. We didn't want to just photocopy it, as the quality would be poor – we wanted to create a nice new edition and include photographs far sharper than the originals were.

(continued on page 2)

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We Welcome Fall!

"Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." *Mother Teresa*



Why Annals hasn't been published yet (continued from page 1)

A few years back, to get started on the project, we asked members if they could re-type the chapters for us. The response was nothing short of amazing – and the typists loved their chapters so much, they asked for more. As of now, almost all the chapters have been typed up and just need proofreading.

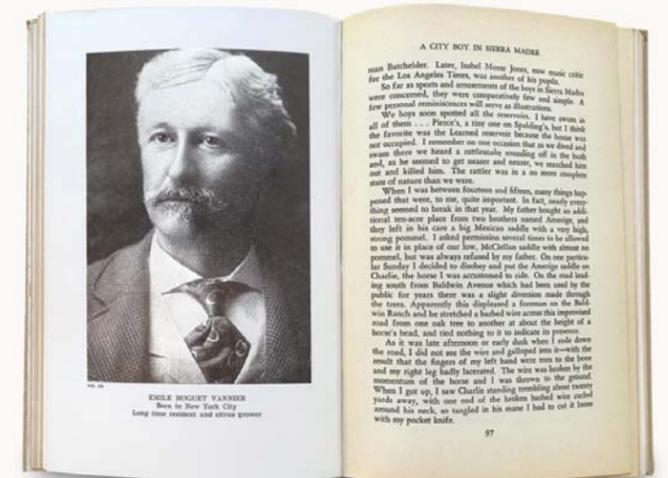
So what's the hang-up?

Photographs! The 37 photographs in the book were not credited, and, as we started to seek the originals, we found that many were not in the archives, which means they must have been from private collections. We realized that it would not be possible to match all the photographs in the original book.

A big photo search is required. In the library there are some binders chock full of photos which are available to the public for reproduction. The photographs are in no particular order and are not indexed. We need to go through them to find ones that illustrate the little history tales.

After we have done that, we can turn to our excellent archivist at the library, Debbie Henderson, to look for any remaining appropriate photographs. Funding does not provide for her to work full-time, so she is extremely busy and we don't want to enlist her help until we have done as much as possible in our search.

Yes, we need volunteers to search the library binders! It should be great fun, and volunteers could spend as little or as much time as they have available.



The search is not possible until the pandemic has abated and we can all go in the library again, of course, but we would love to hear from you if you are interested in helping out. We want to make these history gems available again for everyone to enjoy!

Maggie Ellis
Maggiellis04@msn.com

The First Post Office

By Mrs. E.T. (Isabel W.) Pierce

As for what is now our own little city, you must think of a thousand acres of mesa, covered with spreading oaks and pungent sage brush, where were only the beginnings of a few streets and the yet unfinished houses of three or four of its earliest settlers.



Isabelle Woodin Pierce

We were young and enthusiastic and animated by a spirit of confidence and hope and high endeavor; yet our hearts turned lingeringly toward the friends and loved ones we had left "back East", and oh, how we longed for letters from home!

At any rate, when the neighbors made the plan for a regular delivery of the mail, they fixed upon our house as the place of its distribution. So the mail bag was opened in our dining room and its contents spread out on the table. Representatives of the few families were generally waiting and all helped in sorting the scanty contents of the bag....

But the little settlement soon outgrew such childlike simplicity, and some of the more ambitious began to talk of having a real post office....

But now another problem demanded solution. The post office must needs have a postmaster. No eager candidate competed for the office.... Even the munificent official stipend of a hundred and fifty dollars a year tempted nobody. None of us wished to be bothered – we were all too busy. The people, doubtless from the force of habit, urged that our house continue to be the distributing center; and to this proposition the natural corollary was – my husband's name proposed as postmaster. He already combined the work of both rancher and school teacher, which seemed to us



The Pierce home, Edgemont, in 1886. Northeast corner of Central and Sierra Madre Blvd. Now Sierra Madre Blvd and Michillinda

Our nearest post office was the old Spanish settlement of San Gabriel, and the busy hours of our workaday life left small opportunity for a drive of ten or twelve miles to get the mail. So, as soon as our numbers grew large enough to warrant the expense, we adopted the plan of employing a man to go to San Gabriel and bring up the neighborhood mail. The man so employed was Mr. John Richardson, whose family lived on a government claim (now the Churchill Ranch), which they had taken up in the Little Santa Anita Canyon before our colony was even thought of.

I cannot explain why the Pierce home, which stands at the extreme west of our mesa, should have become a sort of center, but it was. Perhaps because it was the first house encountered by the stranger, who coming from Los Angeles, ventured so far into the wilds of the foothills.



1906 Mail Delivery Schedule
 Post office: Corner of Baldwin and Central [now Sierra Madre Blvd.]
 Open weekdays 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 Mail arrives at 10 a.m., and 6 p.m.
 Mail dispatched at 8:50 a.m. and 4:40 p.m.

Source: A Dictionary of Sierra Madre; and a Guide, Philosopher and Friend for Tourists, Travelers and Investors. Edited by J.G. Blumer 1906

Annals of Early Sierra Madre

Robert C. Frampton photo; Sierra Madre Historical Archives

enough for one man to carry. But the spirit of neighborliness tipped the scale: our home became the post office and Prof. Edward T. Pierce the first official postmaster of Sierra Madre....



1886 Postmarked Letter

A case of pigeon-holes disfigured the wall of our dining room; and the family peace and quiet were subject to irregular and unexpected invasions. It is said that the ancient Royal family of France breakfasted in public; if so, there is certainly one point in which the Pierce family once rivalled royalty....

[O]ne of those living on the outskirts of our colony drove up to our door at noontime and called for us to bring out her mail. Were we not now public servants? Most assuredly! My sister gathered the contents of the pigeon-hole and took it out to the carriage, only to receive a testy complaint rather haughtily delivered, because a telegram sent up in the mail from the Mission had not been instantly dispatched to her home, a mile away. She had yet to learn the basic virtues of the pioneer, sweet reasonableness and adaptability.

Annals of Early Sierra Madre

Published by the Sierra Madre Historical Society 1950

"The office was transferred to the Robinson home at 65 N. Baldwin in 1885. Since 1882, the Post Office had been in seven different locations, until the permanent building was erected in 1964 at 61 S. Baldwin." Sierra Madre Vistas; A Pictorial History of Sierra Madre Compiled and Edited by Elizabeth P. Keith, published by the Sierra Madre Historical Society

Gift of Larry and Suzanne Haller, Sierra Madre Historical Archives



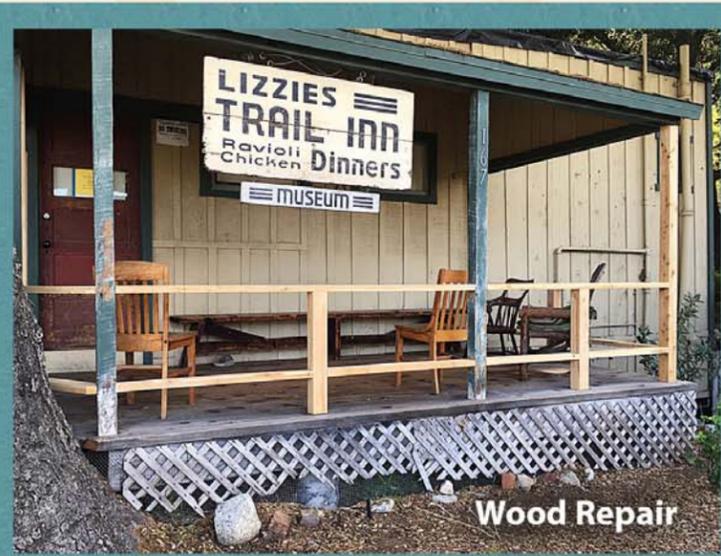
Phyllis Chapman

In the spring we lost Phyllis Chapman, a driving force for preservation in Sierra Madre and a walking history of our town with a phenomenal memory for names, dates and events. At that time we notified our members and gave a detailed account of all she did to promote our history. Now we'll just quote the wonderful acknowledgement bestowed by the publisher of Southern California History; Seeking the Better Life in Sierra Madre:

"To Phyllis Chapman, beacon for preservation, for the countless hours she has spent on behalf of the community of Sierra Madre.

Without her, there would be no Sierra Madre Historical Preservation Society."





Wood Repair

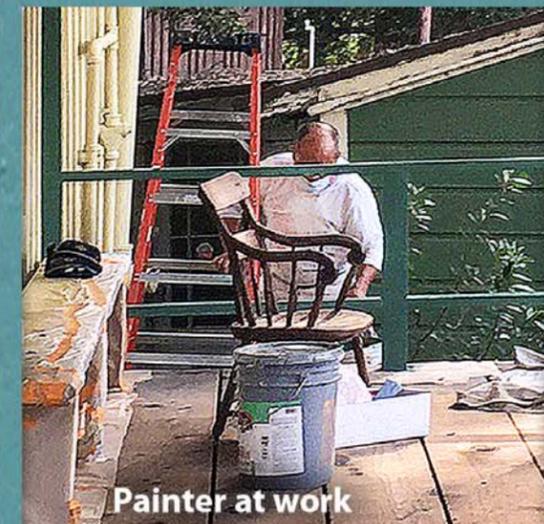
President's Message

Leslie Ziff

All photos by Leslie Ziff



Finished



Painter at work



Wood Repair



There was a lot of wood repair

Accomplishments

- We cleaned up the front garden area of the Richardson House and Lizzie's Trail Inn Museums.
- At Lizzie's we replaced a lot of the wood siding and porch railings thanks to our contractor Jason Johnson. Jason is the son of Elva and Dick Johnson who are long-time members of our historical society.
- We had Lizzie's painted and the porch recoated. Our painter was Jose Estrada who has also painted the Gooden School, the Ascension Church, and many homes in our city.
- We met with the Playhouse to see how we can bring some of our many stories to the stage this coming year.
- We are working with the Sierra Madre Civic Club to bring the proposed newest version of their Walking Tour book to life by offering guided tours on certain weekends throughout the year. This project is in the planning stage.
- We are establishing a Sierra Madre Residents Rock Garden at the museums this coming year. (See Christel's article on the Rock Garden)
- This coming year we are hoping to put a new roof on Lizzie's.
- With the help of Jason Johnson we are continuing the renovation work on the back room of the Richardson House Museum.

We have missed our gatherings: the cemetery tour, Lizzie's Chicken and Ravioli Dinner, and our meetings and talks at the Hart Park House. We know that these types of activities will be back in our lives again. We are going to be innovative and create new types of activities to support the wonderful history of our city. It always surprises me when I meet residents who don't even know that we have two wonderful museums – let alone those who may know of them but have never visited! We look forward to being able to open our doors again, resume our museum tours, and continue our "Featured Speakers Nights".

Until then – stay safe my friends!
Leslie Ziff
Co-President



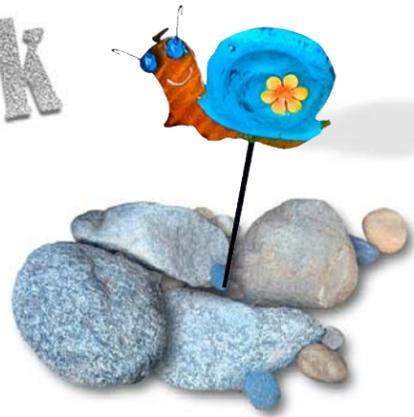
We Welcome Fall!

This is the time of year where we experience fall harvests, scarecrows and pumpkins decorating our porches. October & November bring us "Indian Summer", Halloween, in our family a lot of birthdays, and of course, Thanksgiving. I think that we have a lot to be thankful for as we look back on the year so far. We thank the firefighters, first responders and police for all the horrific battles they have fought to save homes and lives during the raging fires in Monrovia, Sierra Madre and all up and down the west coast. We show our appreciation to all the doctors, nurses and the hospital workers who have cared for so many during the COVID Pandemic. And let us not forget our educators who are experiencing a totally different way of teaching our children and young adults from pre-school through college. We call this our "new normal" and hope that someday soon we can return to a "normal" that will hopefully see a healthier America – and world.

The SMHPS Board has always looked for ways to share the history of our community with the residents and visitors in Sierra Madre. This year has brought many obstacles that have prohibited our activities; but let me share some of the things we have been able to accomplish.

The Museums

ROCK



Too Big



Too Small



Interesting Rocks



Beautiful Rocks

Photographs by Christel Chang

If you haven't yet – please have a quick look at our beautifully newly painted Lizzie's Trail Inn. It and the Richardson House are now shiny and clean, thus the rock garden idea.

Several years ago, the Sierra Madre Garden Club painstakingly created a native California garden in front of the museum. Unfortunately that garden has suffered (lack of water and caretakers) and currently looks a bit neglected. So the idea is to create a Rock Garden which will need very little maintenance.

The Historical Society is asking its members to please consider finding a beautiful rock and saving it for the future when we can have a rock donation get-together and celebrate our beautiful museums and their new Rock Garden.

Christel Chang
SMHPS Ways & Means Co-Chair



Just Right

"If you can lift it, it will work"

Membership Changes Due to the Pandemic



All members were notified in June that, due to the pandemic, the board has instituted the following for our upcoming Historical Society year which runs **from July 1, 2020 – June 30 2021:** All memberships will be extended through the next year. No dues are due. All board members will remain in their present positions.

SIERRA MADRE HISTORY!



Full of photos
.. the perfect holiday gift!

Southern California Story;
Seeking the Better Life in Sierra Madre

On sale at Arnold's Hardware & the library \$25

SIERRA MADRE HISTORICAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY P.O. Box 202, Sierra Madre, CA 91025-0202 Membership / Donation Form

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Telephone _____ E-mail _____

| Membership Level | Specific Donations |
|-----------------------|--|
| ___ \$20 Individual | \$_____ Sierra Madre Historical Archives |
| ___ \$25 Family | \$_____ Oral History Program |
| ___ \$5 Student | \$_____ Museums |
| ___ \$30 Contributing | \$_____ Richardson House |
| ___ \$60 Patron | \$_____ Lizzie's Trail Inn |
| ___ \$100 Supporting | |
| ___ \$500 Lifetime | |

Total Enclosed: \$ _____
Please make check payable to SMHPS

The Sierra Madre Historical Preservation Society is a 501(c)(3). Your contributions are deductible within the limits of the law. Thank You.

Yes, I would like to be a volunteer for the SMHPS _____

Our 2020-2021 Board



Front Row: Jean Coleman, Secretary; Leslie Ziff, Co-President
Back Row: Richard Mays, Treasurer; Teresa Chaure, Co-President; Pat Karamitros, last year's Secretary; Christel Chang & Louise Neiby, Co- Ways & Means Chairs; Jay Whitcraft, Museums Curator.
Not pictured: Maggie Ellis, Vice President & Membership Chair; Jan Wiles, Facebook Chair; Mary Lou Caldwell, Member at Large

OFFICERS

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Co-Presidents | Teresa Chaure & Leslie Ziff |
| Vice President | Maggie Ellis |
| Secretary | Jean Coleman |
| Treasurer | Richard Mays |

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Archives | Vacant |
| Education | Leslie Ziff |
| Facebook | Jan Wiles |
| Membership | Maggie Ellis |
| Museums Curator | Jay Whitcraft |
| Newsletter | Maggie Ellis |
| Oral History | Vacant |
| Ways & Means | Christel Chang & Louise Neiby |
| Website | Maggie Ellis |

DIRECTOR AT LARGE

Mary Lou Caldwell

NON-BOARD MEMBERS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Library Board of Trustees Liaison | Rod Spears |
| Board Development | To be appointed |

2020-2021 Calendar

| | |
|-------------|--------------------|
| October 15 | Zoom Board meeting |
| November 19 | Zoom Board meeting |
| December 17 | Zoom Board meeting |
| January 21 | Zoom Board meeting |