

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY-JUNE 2016, VOL. 9-10

SCHS Presents Annette Kassis: *Sacramento on the Air*

Tuesday, May 24, 7:00 PM (Social Time, 6:30)

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento

An encounter with a radio receiver sent Sacramento Bee newspaperman Carlos McClatchy on a determined path to break into broadcasting. Backed by the enterprising McClatchy family, the Bee became the first Pacific Coast newspaper to enter the radio business. For decades, broadcasting in Sacramento was shaped by the brilliant but fatally flawed Carlos McClatchy; his strong-willed, micromanaging father, C.K.; and his sister Eleanor McClatchy, who sacrificed her own aspirations for the sake of the family business. From a single five-watt station, the family built a large media company, established a radio network with William Randolph Hearst and helped shape media in the American West. Historian Annette Kassis tells the fascinating story of the pivotal McClatchy family and the path they charted through the “ether” above Sacramento.

Annette Kassis has written two previous books, *Prohibition in Sacramento* and *Weinstock's*. She received an SCHS Award of Excellence for the latter. Formerly co-owner of the Sacramento-based advertising agency K&H Marketing, Kassis currently works as the director of consumer and brand marketing for the California Beef Council and serves on the board of the Sacramento History Foundation. She holds a master's degree in history from CSUS. Books will be available!



SCHS Presents Susheel Bibbs: *The Hyers Sisters*

Tuesday, June 28, 7:00 PM (Social Time, 6:30)

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento



*Voices for Freedom: The Hyers Sisters' Dreams, Change, Legacy* film promo. [susheelbibbs.com](http://susheelbibbs.com)

Anna and Emma Hyers were African American opera singers who toured the U.S. from 1871-1894. The sisters, who lived in Sacramento and were educated in San Francisco, became the first African-American women to succeed nationwide as mainstream, touring concert artists. But during an era of intensified ridicule and abuses against African Americans, they left promising opera careers to use their mainstream popularity to confront the ridicule of African Americans by touring black-face minstrels; in so doing they created the first civil-rights musicals. Centered on the African-American story from slavery to freedom, these musicals extolled the dignity and story of their people and created the only opportunity for black leading characters and the first racially mixed casting in American music theater.

Singer, actress, filmmaker, scholar, author and former faculty member of the University of California at Berkeley, Bibbs has toured in opera and concert presentations for over 25 years in

the U.S., Canada, and Europe. She currently tours in musical and dramatic programs portraying the legendary Mary Ellen Pleasant, considered the Mother of Civil Rights in California, while completing work on *Voices for Freedom*, her film on the Hyers sisters, soon to be shown on PBS. This should be a colorful and inspiring talk and will include visuals and film clips. Come early for social time and snacks.

**Note: These are the final scheduled programs (and the last newsletter) until September.**

## To Have and to Hold: Collecting History

By Maryellen Burns

My brother Keith and I recently procured a collection of local restaurant, transportation and other Sacramento memorabilia from an elderly collector concerned that his life's work would be scattered when he died. We purchased his collection of restaurant dishes, menus, hotel silverware, matchbooks, seed packets, advertisements, street car tokens, timetables, books and photographs with the



Iris Sukiyaki, 1960. Courtesy James Lee. Photo Frank Christie

proviso that the collection be kept intact and eventually donated to the Center for Sacramento History and the Sacramento Room of the Sacramento Public Library. We intend to bequeath much of our other Sacramento collection to regional archives, historical societies, and libraries so that others can experience the joy we have in holding a fragment of history in our hands.

History passes through all our hands every day: photographs we take on vacation; the menu we steal from a favorite restaurant; the letters, diaries, glass bottles, ashtrays, broadsides, business cards, greeting cards and other mundane pieces of paper and objects we accumulate over a lifetime. All these flimsy fragments of paper and miscellaneous treasured things trace our national political and cultural histories as nothing else can. They are meaningful to our understanding of who we are and where we come from.

Keith and I like to collect ephemera, a genre of collecting that embraces a multitude of printed objects never intended by their makers to last. We frequent street fairs, flea markets and antique malls, flitting from stand to stand stroking the covers of books, perusing bins of billheads, recipe booklets, catalogs, pamphlets, old signs, posters, and photographs. Between us (and our other brother Scott) we've amassed over 15,000 pieces of paper and artifacts on California history and hundreds of thousands more on the culinary and literary life of the US, comic strips, and the movie industry. For us it's as much about the thrill of the hunt as it is the possession of the thing itself.

Others collect for investment, are driven by a romantic nostalgia for the past, or wish to own something no one else has. The impulse to possess has gripped humankind through the centuries, witness the more than 55,000 museums in 202 countries and

the estimated 119,487 libraries of all kinds in the United States today.

Patrick Melarkey, former Chair of the Sacramento Board of Supervisors, fought hard to save the Alhambra Theater in the 1970s. He was able to salvage a chandelier and other materials now in possession of the Oakland Museum. He tells the story of one of his first forays in preservation.

“My son and I were driving downtown when McCurry's Cameras was being demolished. There was a fence surrounding the site and inside it was a man and his son digging up artifacts from what had been a Native American encampment. He was digging up beadwork and hunting and fishing tools. I wish I could tell you we stopped him but soon we were digging, too. The impulse to uncover hidden treasure was too much for us.”

He went on to say, “One of my deepest regrets is not being able to save the Alhambra. The building and the artifacts inside had much to teach us. What happens when things are just thrown out? History and the voices of the past are silenced. If we allow the destruction of a historic theater or even a house, we lose yet another piece of our collective memory and the lessons those places and things taught us.”



The Alhambra Theater. Public domain image

Lawrence Fox is a member of SCHS and President of the Sacramento Book Collectors Club. “Now, I can claim I'm a collector and not a hoarder.” He has amassed a lifetime of art, books, pop up theaters, and John Sutter and Scott Ennis material, among other obsessions. He collects mostly for the aesthetics and the design of printed matter but also enjoys “the thrill of discovering something you never knew existed and sharing it with others.”

Collecting for most people is a choice, a relaxing activity that counteracts the stress of life, but for some it is a compulsion. Lucky for us, important archives and collections have been amassed by compulsive collectors who perceived the historical importance in a specific topic and were able to acquire their materials in meaningful ways.

The Museum of Wonder and Delight, the Folsom Historical Society's new museum in Folsom, stars Dolph Gotelli's one-of-a-kind collection of vintage toys, international folk art, antique dolls, and Christmas ephemera. E.B. and Margaret Crocker scoured

Europe for art and amassed a huge collection of California art. Their core collection and the house that contained it became the first public art museum founded west of the Mississippi. The Center for Sacramento History and Sacramento Room are packed with generous donations of manuscripts, personal papers, and artifacts by local individuals, families, businesses and community groups.

Julie Okamoto is in the process of cleaning out her parent's house. Some items will be distributed to family, others sold in an estate sale, but one item, a scrapbook her mother started while in the internment camp at Manzanar and continued until two weeks before her death, will be published as a book. The original will be donated to Sacramento State's Japanese American Archival Collection. "My mother collected things that others threw away - bits of string, notes, drawings, and smidgens of conversation she overheard. Every page tells a story about who she was, who she aspired to be, what things she connected with, and what had meaning in her life. Thanks to print on demand and the library, her life will be an open book for all to read."

*If you have a significant story to tell, regional material you'd like to donate to an archive, museum or library and need some advice on how to go about it, contact the Center for Sacramento History (916-808-7072) or the Sacramento Room at the Central Library (916-264-2700). Or SCHS (916-572-9858).*

*You're invited to participate in*

## PICTURE OF SUCCESS

*Fifty Years of the National Historic Preservation Act in California*



**May is Preservation Month** across the nation. Many communities will offer special programs providing a great opportunity for people to get out and discover or rediscover the heritage of their area. This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Office of Historic Preservation seeks organizations to commemorate this anniversary by participating in a year-long campaign: "Picture of Success: Fifty Years of the National Historic Preservation Act in California." Local and tribal communities, agencies, and organizations are encouraged to share photos and text of some of their historic preservation successes. For details see [www.ohp.parks.ca.gov/preservationmonth](http://www.ohp.parks.ca.gov/preservationmonth) or contact [diane.barclay@parks.ca.gov](mailto:diane.barclay@parks.ca.gov), or 916-445-7026.

### Oops: We Goofed

In our March-April issue, some of you may have caught an error in a date given in Bill George's article on the Southern Pacific's role in early hospital development in Sacramento. Bill is very aware that the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. He produced an award winning film on the miracle of that construction. Your editor, who opened the Stanford Mansion State Historic Park to the public and tracked down a fairly extensive library for it, is also quite familiar with that date. Somehow, the opening sentence of Bill's article moved the date forward a couple of years. Yet we both missed it. I'd like to say it was a test to see how many people would catch it. It wasn't. We apologize.

## Announcing A Brief Important Annual Meeting

featuring

**SCHS Board Elections**  
preceding regular program  
**June 28, 2016, 7PM**

Members who cannot attend

this meeting may request a

ballot by email or phone

message to contacts on page 4

**2016 Board of Directors**

Please deliver by April 23, 2016

President: Greg Voelm  
 Vice President: William Burg  
 Treasurer: Eric Bradner  
 Secretary: Gregg Lukenbill  
 History Consortium: Dr. Bob LaPerrière

**Members-at-Large**

Clare Ellis, Marshall Garvey, Bill George, Tom Herzog,  
 Randee Tavarez, Dan Winkelman

**Membership:** Jenan Saunders

**Newsletter Editor:** Patricia Turse

**GOLDEN NUGGETS**



Published at least bimonthly, September to June

## OUT & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
Saturday May 7	10 AM, Noon and 4PM	<b>Annual Jane Jacobs Walks.</b> History tour meets urban planning discussion. Oak Park tour starts at 10AM at Old Soul, 35th & Broadway; Noon "Homesteading the Grid" starts at Crocker Park, 3rd & O; 4PM Punk Rock History bike ride starts at the Crest, 10th & K.	Preservation Sacramento 916-202-4814 <a href="http://preservationsacramento.org/jane-jacobs">preservationsacramento.org/jane-jacobs</a>
Saturday May 7	11AM	<b>The Language of Flowers.</b> Elk Grove Historical Society Annual Spring Tea. Enjoy high tea in a lovely garden setting, \$40. Dress for flowers theme encouraged and prizes will be awarded. Free parking shuttle this year. Tickets online or call Jackie Lewis at 916-685-5135.	Elk Grove Historical Society 9941 Stockton Blvd, Elk Grove <a href="http://elkgrovehistoricalsociety.com">elkgrovehistoricalsociety.com</a>
Saturday May 14	9 AM	<b>Quarterly Preservation Roundtable</b> Collaborative meeting of local history and historic preservation organizations to share updates and information about forthcoming events and initiatives. Coffee and pastries available for \$5 suggested donation.	California State Grange 3830 U Street, Sacramento
Sunday June 5	1-2:30 PM	<b>Mata Hari &amp; Her Sisters: Women &amp; Espionage in WWI</b> Author Carrie Sessarego headlines the Sacramento Public Library's annual <i>World War I Revisited</i> series as it rolls into 1916. Free. Street parking only, but it is free on Sundays.	Ella K. McClatchy Library 2212 22nd St., Sacramento 916-264-2920