

President's Message

We know everyone is eager to return to our usual program calendar at the library. We stand with you and are ready to return to our regular programming as soon as California's public health guidance and the City of Orange allows large gatherings. While we cannot provide definitive dates, we can assure you we are planning to hold our annual gala in January 2022. We understand that reopening public facilities will come with certain health restrictions including allowing more space among participants and perhaps managing the size of our events. Your health and safety are our highest priority and we will keep you informed as we move into less restrictive tiers. There's nothing we enjoy more than bringing Orange history to life for our members and friends and we can't wait until we see you again. You can be assured that you will be among the first to know once officials deem it safe for us to resume our schedule.

Meanwhile, please stay diligent and thank you for your ongoing support of the Society.

Jane Owens



Lionettes - The Early Years and Bertha

Excerpts from Erica Westly's book - FASTPITCH

Continued from last issue --

Orange County became a home to several military bases. Santa Ana Army Air Base, Santa Ana Lighter-Than-Air Naval Station and Marine Corps Air Station El Toro among those.

Bertha Ragan at home in Orange had "recently found out that she was pregnant and raising a child during a war would take every ounce of strength that she had."

The Lionettes played an abbreviated season in 1942 and no games in 1943. Bertha Ragan's

daughter Janice Diane Ragan was born in Orange on February 22, 1943. By 1944 mother and daughter would be in Laredo, Texas where Jim Ragan was stationed as an Army Air Corps mechanic. It wouldn't be until after the war that Bertha returned to pitch for the Lionettes.

The Lionettes did play in 1944 and '45 with a group of local players, several had played prior with the team with the addition of some new members. They played female military service teams and other teams

(Continued on Page 2)



Under the Orange Peel

Rev. Nathan Riley

MELMAC— a brand name of dinnerware molded from melamine resin, made by American Cyanamid, most popular in the 1940s through the 1960s. (Apparently also the fictional planet and homeworld to the alien life-form ALF as well as a Staten Island, NY based ska band from the late 1990s.) Do you remember it? It was well-nigh unbreakable and that's why, for a time when we were apparently all thumbs, it fit into our family growing up here in Orange. I seem to remember other containers too that were designed to stretch out beyond a single use. Some early grocery jars were designed to be repurposed for dinnerware. Do you recall? Like peanut butter or jelly jars later used as glasses?

Step back in time and there were flour sacks designed with colorful prints to be re-used and sewn into clothing when finances were tight and folks lived mostly on the farm. Dad told me that my great aunt sewed these flour sacks into underwear for her daughters! Nowadays as the standard of living has improved for most, there seems to be less of this deliberate dual-use designing. However, as we are taught to become more eco-conscious, who knows, we may actually increasingly return to these 'thrilling days of yesteryear.' What do you think? Well, maybe not the underwear... :-)

Lionettes from page 1

teams like themselves that wanted to continue during the wartime. Their pre-war coach "Shorty" Smith agreed to coach and they did pretty well with the service teams but had trouble with Buena Park Lynx team, who always gave them plenty of game.



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(Lionettes from page 2)

Eaton or Barbara Smith in rightfield.

“Bertha had been away from softball for the better part of three years, but by March 1946, she was back in Orange and was reuniting with the Lionettes. She also had a new part-time job as a youth-sports coordinator for the Parks Department. The teams that the Lionettes faced were different because none of their former Southern California rivals had re-formed after the war.”

“Even though Orange and the Los Angeles area, in general, were in the midst of a major population boom and Orange County’s population had nearly doubled --- the town hadn’t lost any of its charm. Kids and adults still gathered around the fountain in the Plaza on weekends and a long list of town events brought the community together, Bertha’s favorite was the May Festival, with its featured carnival rides and parade with colorful floats.”

“Everyone still came out to see the Lionettes play, too. The men’s softball team, the Cubs, weren’t nearly as successful as Bertha and her teammates. The Lionettes won the 1946 Southern California championship, then in 1947 won it again. They still hadn’t gone to a national softball tournament though, so Bertha never got to find out how her team might have fared against Nina Korgan and the Jax Maids team, who had won the national title five times and stopped competing in the tournament after 1947. Bertha was eager to test her skills against the best players in the country. Before the war, the best players in Southern California generally *were* the best players in the country, but that no longer appeared to be the case.”

“Bertha wasn’t the oldest player on the team, but she was no longer the precocious rookie, either. The memories of Lois Terry and the other Los Angeles stars from the 1930’s had faded, and now Bertha was the city’s best-known softball pitcher. Any concerns that taking time off from the game during the war and having a child would weaken her athletic skills were misplaced. If anything she seemed to come back from the war a stronger pitcher. She had finally gotten over her nerves, and she didn’t struggle with accuracy the way she had when she was younger.”

But then in 1948, the Lionettes went on hiatus. “A local newspaper suggested that that Bertha thought she would be better off playing with a different team. She hadn’t actually said that, but the damage had been done: egos were bruised, feeling hurt, and before Bertha knew it, the team disbanded.” The team needed a sponsor additionally and it was reported that the Santa Ana Queens softball team had an agent trying to poach players off the Orange team. Lots of rumors flying and the editorial section of the Orange Daily News had a running story of what was “supposed to be happening.” So, Bertha moved to Balboa, where Jim had gotten a job working on fishing boats. Not that far from Orange, but it felt like a big change.

“Balboa didn’t have a softball team, but Bertha wasn’t about to let that keep her from playing. She joined the newly formed Red Gals in Monrovia. It was at least an hour drive from Balboa. She missed playing with the Lionettes, but with the Monrovia team she got to play in a league that included the Phoenix Ramblers, the Portland Florists, and the Salt Lake Shamrocks,

(Continued on page 4)

(Lionettes from page 3)

among other competitive teams. It also meant that she would finally have a chance to play in a national tournament, which was hosted by Portland that year.”

“The 1948 tournament marked an important turning point for the national tournament, which in its fifteen-year existence had never been held west of Chicago. At long last teams from the West Coast would have an advantage instead of having to travel across the country on limited funds.”

“Bertha got to play in five games at the tournament before her team was eliminated. The women’s final came down to the Ramblers and the Florists. Although the Ramblers eventually won the title, Betty Evans, the pitcher for the Florists, was the star of the tournament. At twenty-two, Evans, whose nickname was Bullet Betty, was already a veteran player, having been with the Florists since she was fourteen.

“Like Bertha, Evans was adept at fooling batters. One of her signature moves was the ‘double windmill’, in which she circled both arms around twice before throwing the ball so that that the batter couldn’t tell when or from where it was released (that pitch was later outlawed by the rule books). The next spring, Evans moved to Chicago to join the National Girls professional league.

“Bertha, meanwhile, moved back to Orange and reunited with the Lionettes. They settled their differences and joined the league Monrovia played in. In September, they competed in the national tournament for the first time. “The competition was held in Portland again, and many of the same teams participated. They

were there to see the Florists, who with their national title in 1944 and second place finish in 1948, had become one of the most successful sports teams in Oregon history.

“It seemed fitting that a city nicknamed the Rose City would have a softball team named the Florists, and Irv Lind, the team’s sponsor, did in fact sell flowers for a living. While Lind was fully committed to the team, he couldn’t offer his players high-paying jobs and luxurious travel accommodations the way Jax Brewery and other large sponsors could, but he made sure they had high-quality uniforms and equipment “Bertha pitched well at the ’49 tournament---she was described as “near perfect” against a team from Baton Rouge, Louisiana---but the Lionettes were outmatched by the Caterpillar Tractor Diesettes from Peoria, Illinois. The Lionettes faced the Diesettes twice and lost both times, which eliminated them from the tournament. Bertha watched the final from the stands. Once again it came down to the Florists and the Phoenix Ramblers, and once again the Ramblers won.

“Bertha left Portland with a trophy, albeit a somewhat silly one. She had been crowned Miss Softball, an award the Amateur Softball Association (ASA) started giving out during the war. She was flattered, but she hoped that next year she and the Lionettes would be able to bring home the prize that mattered: the national trophy.

“Bertha felt she was entering a new athletic phase now that she was in her late twenties. She no longer had to work to maintain her pitching persona. After years of practice, it had become second nature to her, as had the pitching itself.

To Be Continued -

A History of the Orange Fire Department

The First 75 Years - By Battalion Chief Darell Verburg

(Continued from previous issue)

Chief Tomblin retired in 1951 and Assistant Volunteer Chief Ernie Hagan (son of one of the first volunteers) assumed the position of interim chief until another chief could be appointed. The City Council designated George W. Horton as the first fully-paid Fire Chief in 1952 and Floyd Higgins was appointed Assistant Chief. Fire Chief Horton's salary was \$365 per month. Ernie Hagan had resigned his position as Chief to make way for Horton and was then made Chief of the Volunteers, a position he held until his retirement in 1966.

In 1955, through the efforts of Fire Chief George Horton, the original 40-inch fire bell was returned and mounted in front of the fire station. It had been donated to the "Latin-American Friendly Center" following the 1935 demolition of the wooden bell tower above the 1910 fire station. (*Note: That bell was relocated to the front of the next fire headquarters on South Grand Street in 1969 and will be present again at the new headquarters on East Chapman at Water Street, sometime in the spring of 2022.*).

The move to a fulltime chief was prompted by a preliminary report of the Board of Fire Underwriters, who had just completed a survey in Orange relative to the rating of the city for fire insurance.

Fire Station 2 was activated on East Collins Avenue at Wanda Street to protect the northeast portion of the city in 1959. It was anticipated

that the Villa Park area would annex into the City of Orange.

In 1961 a major fire destroyed the one-story brick building in Olive and situated on the north-east corner of Santa Ana Canyon Road (Orange-Olive Road) and Lincoln Avenue. It housed the Olive Pharmacy, Olive Food Market and the U.S. Post Office. City of Orange Fire units, along with the Olive Volunteer Fire Department were engaged in fighting that fire. The first of many Crown Firecoaches, a 1500 Gallon-per-minute pumper, was delivered in



1961 - Olive Post Office and Food Market

1962 and promptly christened when the Thrifty Drugstore burned at Chapman and Tustin in the pre-dawn hours. Later Fire Station 3 was activated to protect the growing industrial area in the northwestern portion of the city and the first recruit training program was instituted.

(Continued on page 6)



1962 - Orange's first Crown Coach engine, in front of Fire Headquarters at 135 S. Olive

On July 5, 1962, a spectacular fire erupted in the old Rosenberg Walnut Packing House on West Chapman at the Santa Fe Railroad tracks. Like a giant pile of oil-soaked timber, the wooden building became totally involved in fire and was eventually consumed, despite the heroic efforts expended. Engine 1, with Captain Jim Richardson, began an interior attack and then the crew had to run for their lives when fire burned through the main flooring behind them, severing their 2 1/2-inch hose and blocking their main exit. Two recently graduated recruits made quite an impression on the others that day. Jack Gillaspay remembered, “never go into a fire empty-handed, always take a tool with you”, from his recent training. Grabbing a “Hux-bar” off the engine, he popped all the padlocks off all of the exterior doors he passed. It was one of those doors that Engine 1 chose as an escape route. They ran out that small side door, but not before Conrad Ellefson had calmly removed the nozzle he had been taught to protect.

The railroad tracks buckled from the radiant heat; tar ran from adjacent roofs like rain water; firefighters' turnout coats were smoking and

adjacent structures erupted in fire here and there from the tremendous heat, but the men held their positions. The fire was controlled several hours later. An interesting side-note to the drama that day were the large chunks of burning debris from the General Alarm fire dropping all over the city, including Station 2, over three miles downwind. All off-duty personnel had been recalled by the air horn atop Fire Headquarters. Most recalled were assigned to the fire ground, however a few manned the only pumper left to protect the city – the 1928 American La France had one last moment of glory at Station 2.

With the Thrifty Drugstore and Rosenberg Walnut House losses that year, the 1962 fire loss skyrocketed to \$431,000: certainly, one of the highest in history.

The first elevated platform to see service in Orange County, a 65-foot Crown-Pitman Snorkel, was added to the fleet in early May 1963. Although it was built in 1962, the department allowed Crown Firecoach to use it as a demonstrator nation-wide for a year, saving thousands of dollars on the purchase price. Floyd Higgins was appointed Fire Chief in May, 1963 and Edwin V. Quandt was promoted to Assistant Chief following the retirement of George Horton, who had faithfully served the city for 38 years. Fire Station 4 was opened in August to protect the eastern sector of the city and Alberta LeMieux was hired as the Chief's secretary, breaking a longstanding tradition of men only. The 1963 fire loss was back down to \$91,000.

In September, 1965 saw Fire Station 5, near West Chapman Avenue and Main Street, was activated to protect the high-value western portion of the city and the only station on “the other side of the tracks.” *(Continued on page 7)*

(Fire Department - continued)

The Insurance Services Office had long been after the department to provide a fire station west of the Santa Fe Railroad tracks, since all track crossings were at grade and they reasoned that a long train would delay an emergency response. The Underwriters were right, very long trains have often delayed response from the downtown headquarters.



1968 - Station 5 at the corner of north Main Street and west Maple Avenue. Fire Chief Floyd Higgins and Mayor Don Smith pictured.

The last Volunteer Practice Night was held June 22, 1966 when the remaining seven volunteers retired. The Orange Volunteer Fire Department and Association held a final meeting in the headquarters engine room to hallmark the end

HELP URGENTLY NEEDED!!

Vacant Board Position

We are looking for a person to be in charge of the Historical Society marketing and promotion ventures.

This primarily involves implementing ideas to strengthen our media presence, promotional materials or activities, and assistance with annual events.

We need only a couple hours commitment each month for one virtual board meeting and projects.

Contact: Jane Owens at towens46@aol.com

of an era and 61 years of dedicated service to the community. Volunteers (both active and inactive), retired Chief Tomblin and Horton and paid personnel reminisced about past fires and the “good old days.” The seven retiring members were: Volunteer Chief Ernest Hagan, John Brewer, Ray Glessner, Tommy Grant, Robert Hafer, Kenneth Hoffman and Ernest Unzelman. Along with them the word “Volunteer” was retired and the department became simply, the **Orange Fire Department**.

To Be Continued -

NOTE: The O.C.H.S. Annual Dinner for **2021 has been canceled** because of COVID19 concerns. The Board of Directors thought it in the best interest of all concerned to postpone this year's event until January of **2022**. We hope things will be back to near normal then.

2021 OCHS Board of Directors

President - Jane Owens - towens46@aol.com

Vice President, A/V, Programs - Lyle Drinkgern - drinkgern@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer - Bill Utter - bill.utter@hotmail.com

Secretary - Mary Noguera - marysell-soc@gmail.com

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Website - John Russo - russo@johnrusso.org

Hospitality- Carol Summo - csummo@socal.rr.com

Newsletter - Roger Fitschen - fitschen@roadrunner.com

OCHS MEMBERSHIP

Application for Membership Year **2022** (Membership Year covers January-December)

Name _____

Address _____

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Please return application and check to:
Orange Community Historical Society
P.O. Box 5484, Orange, CA 92863-5484

OCHS is a 501(c)(3) organization, ID #33-0416234.
Contributions are tax deductible to
the fullest extent permitted by law.

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (check one)

NEW

~~RENEWAL~~

(See the mailing label for when
your membership expires)

Individual - \$20.00

Family - \$25.00

Life - \$300.00

Business/Organization - \$100.00

Donation - \$_____

Orange Community Historical Society Members enjoy: programs and newsletters, opportunities to support and contribute to the preservation of Orange history, contact with members of the community knowledgeable about Orange history, and discounts on OCHS merchandise.

Our Mission

The mission of OCHS is to commemorate the rich heritage of our community. Our purpose is to collect photographs, written materials and related ephemera, promote research, events, activities and programs celebrating Orange history, and sponsor local history endeavors. We remain self-supporting through memberships, donation bequests and special projects.

We welcome everyone.

LOCAL HISTORY QUESTIONS?

(714) 288-2465 | history@cityoforange.org

Check out the Orange Public Library's

Local History and 24/7 Reference Service

www.cityoforange.org/library

The City of Orange website provides a brief history of Orange, as well as demographics and contact information for schools, businesses and organizations in the area.

ORANGE HISTORIC AFGHANS

Red & White or Green & White Afgans:

\$45.00 with Membership, \$55 without

If undeliverable please return to:

ORANGE TRIBUNE

Orange Community Historical Society

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