

# West Adams Matters **Olden Time Holiday Festivities:** A Los Angeles Pioneer Recounts Christmas 1857 in the City of Angels

#### by William H. Workman

(Read before the Pioneer Society, June 2, 1900)

Having been requested by your Literary Committee to present you this evening some sketches of the holiday season in early Los Angeles, I have taken occasion to note down a few episodes as they recur to my memory.

Los Angeles, when I arrived in 1854, was a small town of about 3,000 inhabitants, 2,500 of whom were natives of California, and the remainder were estranjeros, as Americans and foreigners were called. The people, especially the Americans and Europeans, always observed the various holidays by characteristic festivities and grand reunions.



On New Year's day almost all of the American element would turn out to make calls, for New Year's calls were then the universal custom. No friend was forgotten on that day, and pleasant were the reunions, of acquaintances and friends, and the making of new friends. Nearly every family kept open house, and not infrequently entertained hundreds of callers on this occasion. The custom was so general that many of the prominent native Californians adopted it in their hospitable homes and thereby delightfully increased New Year's calling lists of the Los Angeles beaux. But alas, the picture has its shadows, though my memory would linger only on its brightness. At each place of visiting were prepared refreshments of no mean proportions. These refreshments were of a liquid as well as a solid nature, and if one did not partake heartily, it was a breach of etiquette, which the fair hostess was loath to forgive or forget.

Now, my friends, you can readily see that if each caller partook repeatedly of turkey and cranberry sauce, of plum pudding, of mince meat pie, of eggnog, of wine, etc., and particularly of etc., he would be pretty full before closing time came round. As a participant (continued on page 8)

#### WAHA Annual Holiday Party Sunday, December 12 3 to 6 p.m. 2101 S. Gramercy Place (Western Heights)

You're invited to a WAHA's annual Holiday Party, to be held this year at the Hugh Asher Residence (aka Marvin Gaye Mansion), a Craftsman/Tudor manor designed by Sumner Hunt and built in 1905.

Millionaire stock market and real estate investor Hugh Asher hailed from Kentucky, where he raised thoroughbred horses. In 1904, Asher purchased nine parcels from developer Abbot Kinney, selling six lots and hiring the architecture firm Hunt & Burns, and builders Alta Planing Mill Co. to construct an imposing 5,352-square-foot, slate-roofed manor, carriage house and



detached billiards room on the remaining three. Inside, the traditional Craftsman design elements included cut-out stair



balustrades, heavy wood moldings and wainscoting. The huge entry and reception area flows to the dining room, music parlor and the living room and study areas, creating a wonderfully-open space.

Soon after this residence's construction, Asher moved to a walnut ranch in El Monte. There were a succession of owners through the years. In 1975, Motown singer Marvin Gaye's production company paid \$30,500 for this spacious residence, signing it over to Gaye's parents, Marvin, Sr. and Alberta Gay, 18 months later. Unfortunately, in 1984, during a family argument the senior Mr. Gay fatally shot his son.

WAHA hosts this afternoon party (it is not a potluck). Festive holiday fare will be on the table, and all of WAHA's members, friends and volunteers are welcome. Please RSVP to WAHAholiday@aol.com so we know that you are attending. ●

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Lucy E. Wheeler/Martin E. Weil Residence; Charles (above) and Henry Greene



# WEST ADAMS HAS ANOTHER NEW HCM

The ONLY Greene & Greene-Designed Home in Los Angeles is Officially designated as West Adams' Newest Historic Cultural Monument

West Adams is home to Los Angeles's only remaining Greene and Greene-designed residence, located at 2175 Cambridge St. Now the Lucy E. Wheeler/Martin E. Weil Residence has officially been designated Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument No. 991. It was named for its original owner, Lucy Emery Wheeler, and its most recent owner, Martin Eli Weil, a noted restoration architect who owned this landmark home for 25 years until his death nearly two years ago. ●

# Jefferson Park Moves Forward as an HPOZ

For eight years residents in Jefferson Park have worked hard to have the City of Los Angeles recognize the Jefferson Park area as a culturally and historically significant neighborhood.

In response to these community efforts the City is now in the process of designating Jefferson Park as a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ). The official public workshop/open house was held Tuesday, December 7. City Planning staff presented the proposed historic district and the proposed Preservation Plan. Next steps include a possible second workshop (tentatively set for the evening of December 15; visit the webste listed below for updated information) and, in the next few months, public hearings at the Cultural Heritage Commission, the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Jefferson Park's houses, built mostly in the Arts & Crafts style in the early 1900s, are recognized for their craftsmanship and beautiful details. American Bungalow Magazine says that Jefferson Park "offers some of the oldest and best-constructed [Arts & Crafts] housing stock, with a level of architectural detail and variation that is the hallmark of the finest bungalow neighborhoods across the country."

Jefferson Park also has a rich and important cultural history that is woven into houses in the neighborhood. Famous past



residents include actress Hattie McDaniel (the first African-American to win an Oscar), jazz musician Melba Liston, the Mills Brothers, and other great artists.

For more information about the workshop or the proposed Jefferson Park HPOZ, or to sign up for e-mail updates, go to www. JeffersonParkUnited.org, and click on "History," or call 323-606-8177.

WAHA | West Adams Heritage Association

# President's Message by John Patterson

The Holidays are upon us, and what a joyous Season we have to celebrate. This has been an incredible year of accomplishments for WAHA, and with the New Year racing toward us, I am looking forward to the next steps in building our organization and expanding our outreach to our neighbors and neighborhoods.

Even a bit of rain Sunday night couldn't dampen the spirits of our annual Holiday Progressive Dinner Tour. This tour is always our single largest fund-raising event but this year we recorded an astounding 60% increase in ticket sales over the prior year. And while producing this tour event is an exhaustive effort every year for scores of WAHA volunteers, the funds raised allow us to carry on our mission of historic preservation and education while at the same time providing a social focus for our community to gather together.

The coming year foresees a continued outreach into the community. We will be participating with Pico Union Housing with an education program designed to train at-risk youth with pertinent job skills as well as a better understanding as to the benefits associated with preservation.

We will be looking for opportunities to work with other Preservation organizations throughout Los Angeles, building on the success of our partnership with Pasadena Heritage's Bungalow Weekend this past October. WAHA will be actively supporting the LA Heritage Alliance, and we will join its hundreds of member organizations in a Greater Los Angeles celebration of L.A.'s 230th birthday in 2011.

All in all, the New Year will bring many new possibilities for the West Adams community to come together to participate in our own projects as well as special programs with like-minded organizations beyond our immediate surroundings.

Most importantly, I will look forward to meeting more and more of my local neighbors, and take this opportunity to send each and every one of you:

Best Wishes for the Holiday Season and the Happiest of New Year's.

John Patterson may be reached by e-mail at President@WestAdamsHeritage.org

## **Historic Sports Venue In Peril**

#### Expo Park Sports Arena Slated for Demolition

In 1959, Wilt Chamberlain played his first professional basketball game there. In 1960, the Democratic National Convention nominated John F. Kennedy for president there. And now it's mostly home to the occasional controversial rave. It's the Welton Becket-designed Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena, and its operators, the L.A. Coliseum Commission, want to demolish it. The Commission released a draft environmental impact report in late November that considers two potential replacement projects--a multi-use outdoor amphitheater and a 22,000 seat Major League Soccer (MLS) stadium. According to the report, the Arena would need major repairs to stick around as is, and is already operating at losses between \$750,000 and \$900,000



a year.

Under the multi-use plan, the arena would be demolished and a bowl-shaped, open-air amphitheater would be built into the existing depression. An 800-squarefoot concrete stage at the bottom of the theater would be semi-surrounded by tiered, grass-covered seating. The rest of the 15 acre site would be flat, grasscovered open space. The DEIR proposes gatherings including farmers' markets, community events, and concerts with capacity up to 90,000 people. (Capacity for the Arena and the Coliseum combined would stay about the same as it is now).

While the DEIR acknowledges that the Arena is eligible for the California Register of Historic Places, it says a historic retention alternative considered in the report isn't financially feasible. According to an evaluation by the historic consulting

(continued on page 6)

# round the House

## Papa Cristo's: A Historic West Adams Resource

For more than 60 years, C & K Importing Company has been serving the Greek community on the same corner at 2771 West Pico Boulevard. Sam Chrys opened the market in 1948 with intentions to bring the foods and wines of Greece to Los Angeles. He did so by importing all products from Greece while still maintaining a low price to his valued customers and friends. C & K Importing Company grew into a market where all ethnicities come to visit and always enjoy the purity of the product assortment.

In 1968 Chrys Chrys purchased the business from his father to carry on the legacy. Chrys Chrys had an idea to open a Greek restaurant. He traveled to the many regions and islands of Greece to understand the flavors and tastes in authentic Greek cooking. He wanted to bring this



authenticity back to his restaurant. In the early 1990's, Papa Cristo's Taverna was established. Only meats, seasonings, cheeses, olive oils, and other culturally true ingredients are used to prepare the dishes offered at Papa Cristo's Taverna.



C & K Importing Company and Papa Cristo's Taverna are known as Athens in L.A. Its reputation has grown past California and to as far as Greece itself. Chrys Chrys takes pride in providing his customers and friends with the best tasting foods, best service, and best price - just like his father.

Now, Papa Cristo's has been voted "Best Greek Restaurant in Los Angeles" for 2011 by Zagat participants.

WAHA members enjoy a Membership Discount of 10 percent on catering from Papa Cristo's -- nice to know if you are considering Greek specialties for your holiday entertaining.

Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed Monday 2771 West Pico Boulevard (at Normandie) 323-737-2970 www.papacristos.com

C&K Importing Company's grand opening in 1948 (left); Chrys Chrys (above)

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## Las Posadas Re-enactment at Andres Pico Adobe

Saturday, December 11 5 p.m. 10940 Sepulveda Blvd. (Mission Hills)

The 176-year-old landmark Andres Pico Adobe in Mission Hills will host a one-night Las Posadas, a traditional Christmas pageant that re-enacts Mary's and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus. Sponsored by the San Fernando Valley Historical Society (SFVHS), this community event is free and open to the general public. Complimentary traditional refreshments will be served.

Las Posadas features a procession with lighted candles that follows the characters of "Mary and Joseph" from door to door as they are refused lodging for the night. With each refusal, a traditional song is sung, and the couple wearily moves on to another inn seeking shelter. Finally, they come to rest in a stable for farm animals where Jesus is born and swaddled in a feeding trough, or manger. Afterward, there is a celebration with coffee, hot chocolate, pan dulce (Mexican pastries) and a piñata-breaking party.

Visitors may participate in the procession with lighted candles, which will be available from SFVHS for a small



donation. Children are encouraged to dress as shepherds or farm animals. "The Adobe's

many doors and its graceful Early California architecture make it a perfect setting

for this most beautiful Christmas event," said Carole Morton, SFVHS president. "We invite all members of the community to come and share an evening dedicated to the spirit of the holidays."

The Andres Pico Adobe is one of the oldest residences in the City of Los Angeles. It represents a bygone era and the rich historical past of the San Fernando Valley. Inside are museum displays of native American beads, Mission and Spanish-Mexican era artifacts, costumes and clothing that span more than a century, and furniture from the Victorian era, when the Adobe was home to members of the Pico family. The Society is caretaker of the Andres Pico Adobe and of the Pioneer Cemetery in Sylmar.

For additional information, please contact the San Fernando Valley Historical Society at 818-365-7810, or visit the Society's Web site at http://www.sfvhs.com.

(Last year this popular event was cancelled due to rain. Please call to confirm performance should rain threaten this year.)





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# Preservation Matters

# **Sports Arena in Peril**

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firm ICF Jones & Stokes, the Sports Arena is associated "with events that have made a significant contribution to Los Angeles history. As such, the Sports Arena has been determined to be a historically significant resource, the demolition of which would result in a significant environmental impact."



Renderings of the two concepts: multi-use venue (left) and soccer stadium (right)

Welton Becket and Associates are considered one of the premier post World War II architects of modern

buildings in Los Angeles. Among the firm's designs are many UCLA buildings, including Pauley Pavilion, the Music Center, the Pacific Cinerama Dome, and the iconic Capitol Records Building in Hollywood. In 1958, the Welton Becket firm was selected to oversee the largest urban development in the nation, Century City, built on the former 260-acre 20th Century Fox backlot – the "first completely planned community in Los Angeles designed for the Freeway Age."

The Sports Arena is an ellipse-shaped structure constructed within a large excavated hole, so that the seven-story arena extends only 45 feet above the ground. Inside, the Sports Arena has terrazzo floors and wrap-around lobbies with ceramic tile walls. The arena interior features a long steel truss with a span of 315 feet. At the time of its construction, it was the world's longest steel truss roof.

The Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena was opened on July 4, 1959 by then U.S. Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Its first event followed four days later, a Bantamweight title fight between Jose Becerra and Alphonse Halimi on July 8, 1959. The Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena became a sister facility to the adjacent Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and has been home court to the Los Angeles Lakers, the Los Angeles Clippers also of the NBA, the Los Angeles Kings of the NHL for their inaugural 1967 season, the USC Trojans basketball team, the UCLA Bruins Basketball team, the Los Angeles Cobras of the AFL in 1988, and the original Los Angeles Stars of the ABA. Since the Trojans left, the arena has taken on a lower profile. The arena still holds high school basketball championships, as well as concerts and conventions.

Since its opening day, the arena has hosted the 1960 Democratic National Convention, the 1968 and 1972 NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four, the 1992 NCAA Women's Basketball Final Four, the 1963 NBA All-Star Game, and the boxing competitions during the 1984 Summer Olympics. The arena has hosted concerts by many famous artists, including Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band, Bon Jovi, The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, The Police, Van Halen, Def Leppard, AC/DC,



Red Hot Chili Peppers, Prince, Michael Jackson, U2, Pixies, Grateful Dead, Aerosmith, David Bowie, Madonna, and Daft Punk, among others.

The 347-page Draft Environmental Report and its technical appendices are available online at http://lacoliseumlive. com/joomla/

The 45-day public comment period on the draft report runs until 5 p.m. on December 30. (For those not used to these kind of efforts, it is NOT unusual for a DEIR to be released under the radar during the holiday season; if you wish to voice your concerns please do not expect an extension of time.)

Written comments should be directed to Coliseum General Manager Pat Lynch at 3939 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, CA 90037. ●

— Excerpted from reporting by Adrian Glick Kudler in *Curbed L.A.* and Paresh Dave in *Neon Tommy*.

## "A Wonderful Christmas Tree"



THE WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS TREE.

In 1882, Mary C. Webster published a book entitled "The Wonderful Christmas Tree: A Story in Rhyme," which included the illustration above. She was retelling her family stories passed down through generations. Look closely at the tree. If you're familiar with the history of Christmas ornaments, you'll know that some of the earliest Christmas trees, like this one, contained miniatures of everyday household objects. Examples from this tabletop tree include



a basket, a jug, and a glove. Then, as now, the spirit of the holidays was celebrated at home, surrounded by family and friends, gathered together around the tree. •



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#### AVAILABLE

**Spacious Jefferson Park Bungalow** — Century-old charm combined with modern updates. Hardwood floors, painted trim., two fireplaces, 2 BR, 1 BA. Jefferson Park is pending HPOZ status. Probate -- needs court approval (no loan contingency). \$310,000. *David Raposa* 

**Rare Offering: L.A.'s only Greene & Greene Residence.** The Lucy E. Wheeler Residence, c. 1905., is the former home of noted restoration architect Martin Eli Weil. Protected by a conservancy easement, the Wheeler Residence is located in the Harvard Heights HPOZ historic district in West Adams. Original lighting and built-ins, 2,600 square feet, 4 bedrooms, 2.5 baths. \$699,000. *David Raposa* 

Jefferson Park Bungalow — Needs restoration. Original woodwork (painted), 2 BR, 1 BA, inglenook, built-ins and great windows. Probate, needs court approval. \$229,000. *David Raposa* 

#### IN ESCROW

Oxford Park home — Adam Janeiro, Buyer's agent Arlington Heights Landmark — Suzanne Henderson, Buyer's agent SOLD

Kinney Heights Restored Craftsman with lauded eco-sensitive landscaping — David Raposa, Seller's and Buyer's agent

Welcome, Marc Walton and Sherine Badawi Walton! Jefferson Park Bungalow — Adam Janeiro, Buyer's agent West Adams Fourplex — David Raposa, Seller's and Buyer's agent

# Season's Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year from All of Us!

#### David Raposa, Suzanne Henderson, Adam Janeiro, Darby Bayliss, Conrado Alberto, Carlton Joseph, Jane Harrington

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# **Oldtime Holidays in Los Angeles**

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for many years in the ceremony, I can vouch for its correctness, and I can assure you that many a fellow did not care to repeat the calling process before the year rolled around, or at least until he had thoroughly digested all that he had eaten or imbibed.

I will give you a little story of two Christmas days in Los Angeles. On the first of these Christmas days, I have reason to believe, was held the first Christmas tree ever prepared in Southern California. In 1857 Los Angeles could boast of but a limited residence section. The plaza formed the center of the city. North of it were the adobe homes of the native Californians population, while south of it were the few business houses of that date and the homes of the American residents. Los Angeles street marked the eastern boundary, and beyond large vineyards and orchards extended toward the Los Angeles river. First Street, open only to Main, marked the southern limit of population, except, perhaps, a few homes just the other side of it.



On Main Street, between First and Court, there was in those days a long row of adobe houses occupied by many of the best families of primitive Los Angeles. This neighborhood was often designated "the row," and many are the pleasant memories which yet linger in the minds and hearts of those who lived there in "good old days" and who still occasionally meet an old time friend and neighbor. In "the row" lived an Englishman and his wife—Carter by name. Their musical ability was often a source of great delight to those about them, and they possessed the faculty (well called happy) of bringing to a successful issue matters pertaining to the social entertainment of others. So it was that about the year 1857, when it was proposed that a union Christmas tree be prepared. Dr. Carter and his wife were prime movers in the affair.

Where now stands the McDonald block was the home of Dr. Carter, and it was there that many Los Angeles families enjoyed in common the gaily-decorated tree which had been so lovingly prepared by the many willing hands of friendly neighbors. The children were, of course, the honored guests, for the thought of the little ones had incited the work of preparation.

Los Angeles, into which no railroad came, was in those days far away from the world, and the limited resources of the time would restrict even Santa Claus' possibilities. But on that Christmas Eve no limitations were felt, for the true spirit of the Christmastime illuminated each and every heart. Dr. Carter officiated as Santa Claus, while music and songs, dancing and games and the pleasant chatter of friends completed the evening's festivities. That night the children of Los Angeles, than whom none of their successors are happier, did not retire until the wee small hours of Christmas day.

Another Christmas was in 1861, and heavy rains had fallen for one whole week previous to that Christmas day. The family of Andrew Boyle, living on the high lands east of the Los Angeles River, had accepted an invitation to dine at the home of Don Mateo Keller, who lived on what is now Alameda Street, near Aliso. The rain fell heavily and persistently, and the river rose gradually until it was impossible to ford the swollen stream. There were no bridges in that day, and so when Christmas came and the storm still continued, the dinner across the river was out of the question. This might have been all, but it soon became evident in the family of Mr. Boyle that there would be difficulty in securing a proper repast at home, for, on account of the weather, they had been unable to replenish the larder, and there was not a bit of flour in the house. The question was how to secure the necessary adjuncts of culinary success. There were no stores east of the river, and but a few scattered adobe homes. At length it was decided that a serving man, Jesus, a strong, stalwart Sonorean, faithful and discreet, could be sent upon this mission, for his life and training reduced all danger to a minimum. He readily undertook the task. A note of regret was addressed to Mr. Keller and entrusted to the messenger.

# History Matters

It seems incredible, perhaps, to those who have seen year after year the vast expanse of sand which we call a river, but on this Christmas day it was a torrent. The Sonorean divested himself of much of his apparel and swam to the opposite shore. He reached the home of Mr. Keller, delivered his note and secured from the grocery store the provisions which he needed. Mrs. Keller, in her open-hearted hospitality, would not allow the messenger to depart without a goodly share of the Christmas dinner. Jesus prepared to return. He secured a board of sufficient surface. On it he placed the goods, securely wrapped so as to protect them from the water, and plunging into the water he swam across, pushing before him the improvised raft with its cargo. He safely reached the opposite shore and delivered unharmed the articles entrusted to his care. You may be sure that the brave fellow enjoyed to the utmost his well-earned Christmas dinner, and, though the rain fell as heavily during the ensuing week, there was no lack of cheer in the home beyond the river. ●





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20% discount on 1st visit - 10% for each later visit

#### **McCabe Property Management**

2461 Santa Monica Blvd., #235, Santa Monica 310-828-4829; fax 310-828-7959 www.mccabbepropertymanagement.com Reduced set-up fee of \$50 for any property (\$150 savings) **Ti-KEN Personal Account Manager** 310-701-2399; fax 310-828-7959 ti.ken.manager@gmail.com Reduced set-up fee of \$100 for new account (\$150 savings) **Port Royal Antiques** 1858 West Jefferson Blvd. 323-734-8704 10% discount Real Door 3125 La Cienega 310-836-2687 www.realdoor.com 10% discount on products and services **Vintage Plumbing Bathroom Antiques** 9939 Canoga Avenue, Chatsworth, 818-772-1721 (hours: by appointment only) 10% discount on purchases at Chatsworth facility Boulevard Vacuum & Sewing Machine Co. 5086 W. Pico Boulevard, 323-938-2661 10% discount on sale of new vacuums, and vacuum service & repair Jonathan Bert Rollup Window Screens 626-359-0513 5% discount on repairs or installations of rollup screens A CALL TO MEMBERS If you frequent a local business — retail store, restaurant, service provider, etc. — ask them if they would offer a discount

to WAHA members. Explain that they'd benefit from the increased exposure to local consumers, and be listed in the WAHA monthly newsletter. Or, call me at 323-733-6869 and I'll contact them — Steve Wallis

## WAHA....Creating Our Future by Preserving Our Past

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### **Upcoming Events**

Look for more details on upcoming events on WAHA's website, www.WestAdamsHeritage.org

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The Hugh Asher Residence, 2101 S. Gramercy Place (Western Heights)

# WAHA'S ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

Sunday, December 12 3 to 6 p.m. The Historic Hugh Asher Residence (aka Marvin Gaye Mansion) 2101 S. Gramercy Place Western Heights

You're invited to a WAHA's annual Holiday Party, to be held this year at the Hugh Asher Residence (aka Marvin Gaye Mansion), a Craftsman/Tudor manor designed by Sumner Hunt and built in 1905. Celebrate the Season and a successful Holiday Tour with West Adams friends, neighbors and volunteers.

WAHA hosts this event (not a potluck) with a festive holiday spread. Please do let us know you are attending! RSVP to: WAHAholiday@aol.com

(See page 1 for complete information)

The WAHA Matters Newsletter is a publication of the West Adams Heritage Association. Members and supporters of WAHA are invited to submit articles to the Newsletter. Letters will be published subject to space constraints and will be cut for length if necessary. Articles will be published subject to acceptance by the editors of the WAHA Board. Advertising is subject to the approval of the publishers. Although the Association appreciates its many fine advertisers, the Association does not accept responsibility for claims made by advertisers. Services and products are not tested and appearance of advertising does not imply, nor does it constitute, endorsement by the West Adams Heritage Association. Copyright 2010. All rights for graphic and written material appearing in the newsletter are reserved. Contact Director of Publications for permission.



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