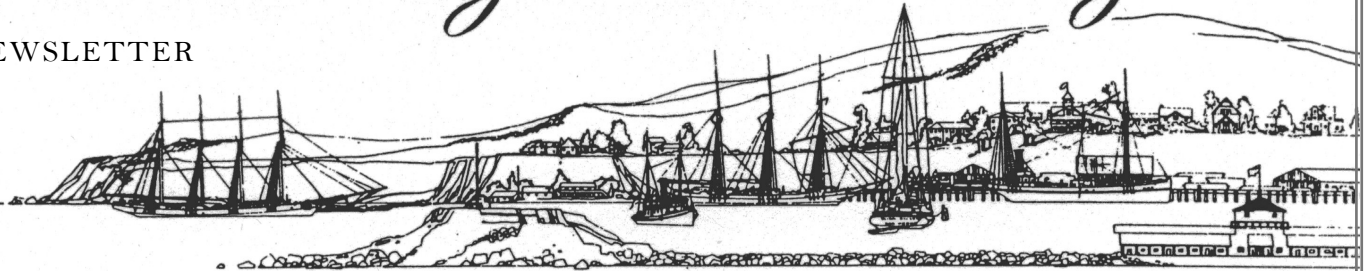


# San Pedro Bay Historical Society

NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 35 NO. 1

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009

## A Hundred Years and More to Come

By Mona Dallas Reddick



A grand three-day celebration marked the centenary of San Pedro's own Williams' Book Store, the longest continuously operating bookstore in Los Angeles. On Friday, January 23, state and local dignitaries presented owners Anne and Jerry Gushá with embellished certificates to honor their service to the community as well as the longevity of the store. SPBHS members were also on hand, and society president Joe McKinzie presented a letter of congratulations stamped with the seal of the original City of San Pedro.



President Joe McKinzie presents bookstore owners Anne and Jerry Gushá with the Society's letter of congratulations.

Newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, and online media have already sketched the history of the store and published interviews with Anne and Jerry. Still, I discovered a few facts and photos that fill in the early story.

The store's founder, Edward Thorpe Williams, was born in Oswestry, England, in 1869. Oswestry, an old Shropshire market town, sits close to the border of Wales, and Welsh ancestry runs in the Williams family.

Williams' involvement with the printed word predates the founding of the bookstore. The 1901

English census gives his occupation as a news agent and stationer with his own shop. He also had some interest and perhaps accomplishment in typography, for a typographers' guild membership book from England, preserved by his grandson, Lynn Hartley, shows regular dues payments to the guild.

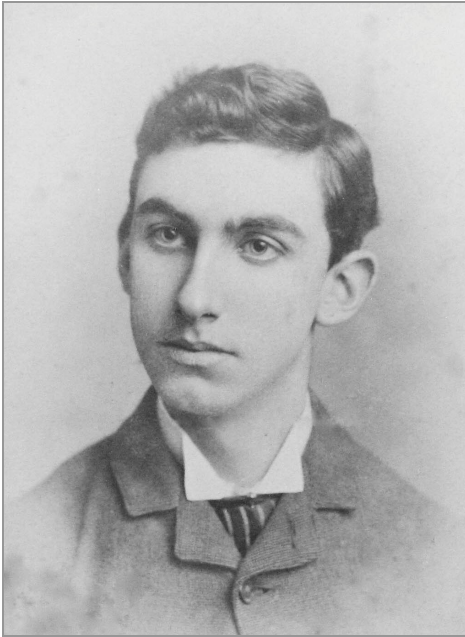
Williams immigrated to the United States in June, 1902. Upon landing in Boston, he straightaway headed west to Huntington Park, California. Just several months later he applied for naturalization, which was granted after the usual five year residency period.

In searching for a good location to open up a bookstore, Williams was advised by his uptown friends to consider San Pedro, where harbor development was under way. Despite the long haul from Huntington Park, Williams took the advice and launched his San Pedro business in 1908 or 1909. The Williams family continued to reside in Huntington Park until at least 1920, according to U.S. Census data. One can imagine that the Pacific Electric Railway made commuting possible, if such was the case, since an eastern branch of the PE ran past Huntington Park and tied into the main north-south line that came to the harbor area.

Williams' was San Pedro's first bookstore. The historical marker erected by the City of Los Angeles dates its establishment to 1909. Ethyl Williams Smith, who inherited the business from her father after his death in 1940, recalled that her father always used the date of 1908 on his letterhead stationery as she did herself. The research of the Gushás has not, so far, substantiated the store's physical presence in town prior to 1909, the year San Pedro underwent consolidation with Los Angeles.

For the first half of its existence, this was a store that would not sit still. The earliest address documented through newspaper advertisements available in the SPBHS Archives is 519 So. Beacon Street, located in the San Pedro Daily News Building. By the end of 1914, the store announced that it was forced to vacate and thus slashing prices. "Our Xmas cards are priced way down," ran one ad. Other early addresses can be traced from the annual directories issued by the Los Angeles Directory Company and from other local directories found in the SPBHS Archives.

*Continued on page 3*



*Edward Thorpe Williams, bookstore founder. Dates of the two pictures at left are uncertain, but the cut of the morning coat helps place the middle picture in the 1890s. The picture at far right is clearly from the San Pedro period.*



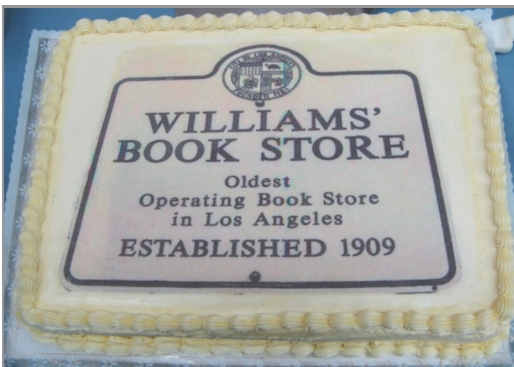
*At right: Ethyl Williams Smith, daughter of E. T. Williams, owned and operated the store from 1940 to 1980, when it was then sold to the Gushás.*

*At left: Interior of the 708 Pacific Avenue location, sometime around the mid-1950s. Former employee Bill Grant stands next to Anne Gushá; Ethyl Williams Smith on the far right. The woman in between Anne and Ethyl has not been identified.*



*Below right: Absorbed in a good book, Anne Gushá around 1940.*

*Below: The pièce de résistance, a layer cake created and donated by the San Pedro Coffee Company for the celebration. The cake is imprinted with the City of Los Angeles historical marker that stands outside the store. Note the date!*



Continued from page 1

Gaps in our collection make it impossible to create a continuous timeline or pinpoint when each move was made. Early addresses and dates that appear in the directories or newspaper ads, and known from the recollections or personal records of the Gushás, are the following:

519 So. Beacon St (first known address, found in printed advertisements as early as 1910)

538 So. Beacon St. (1915)

603 So. Beacon St. (1917 – 1918)

279 W. 6th St. (1920 – 1929)

276 W. 6th St. (1930 – 1932)

284 W. 6th St. (1934 – 1946)

By 1947, the store had relocated to 738 So. Pacific, where it remained until it moved a few doors north in 1955 to 708 So. Pacific. Finally, though we may not be done yet, the store was moved to its current location at 443 W. Sixth Street in 1988.

Ethyl Williams remembered that her father used to know all the children in town since his store was the only place that school books could be purchased. Besides school books,

the store carried rare and used books and served as a library. In an ad of the 1930s, the store was billed as Williams' Book Store Circulating Library. Membership was one dollar, with no refund, fiction titles were three cents per day and non-fiction five cents. No leisurely reading when the pennies were mounting!



708 S. Pacific, 1977

The store has always sold more than books. In the early decades, it carried stationery, magazines new and used, music, and collectible postage stamps. From the *San Pedro Daily News* of June 1, 1912, one ad reads "Just in! A Parcel of Music including 'The Wreck of the Titanic!'" The bookstore apparently offered one of the very first pieces of sheet music to feature a song commemorating the loss of the great liner that had sunk less than two months previous on April 14 of that year.

The store encouraged many a junior philatelist, including me, with offerings of packaged and individual

postage stamps. When I had managed to save fifteen cents or so (this was the 1950s), I would ask to see one of the two large stamp albums kept behind the counter. Ethyl Williams would carefully unhinge whichever stamp I had chosen after long deliberation and slip it into a glassine envelope to carry home. Thrift, geography, and history all at the same time.

Many will have their own special recollections of the store. Consider sharing them with the Gushás or jot them down and send them to me in care of the Archives. I will make sure they go into a folder on the bookstore for others to enjoy. In the last few years, San Pedro has seen several of the oldest businesses close their doors. They are missed not only for their services but for the ties they gave us to the younger days of our town and ourselves. May Williams' Book Store keep its doors open for many years to come. Think I'll go buy a book!

Thanks to Lynn Hartley for photos of E. T. Williams and Ethyl Williams Smith and to Williams' Book Store for sharing records and vintage store interior photos on page 2. Other photos by Robert and Mona Reddick. Thanks to Kara McCleod for help on dating men's fashion at the end of the nineteenth century.

## Report from the Archives

The San Pedro Bay Historical Society Archives perform a valuable service for the local community and many visitors. We gather information using newspaper clippings, photos, maps, documents, pamphlets and other memorabilia. This information is sorted by category to help the researcher.

Each item accepted by the Archives is entered in the acquisition book for the year. It is described and given a number showing the year, donor, and number of items donated by that person at that time. If necessary, a card for the card catalog is typed (yes, I know, old-fashioned but still very useful).

All this work could not be done without some very devoted volunteers. Every Monday from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Doralee Uruburu (on temporary medical leave), Al Bitonio, Maureen Grieder, Cheryl Bryan, and I are at the Archives. On Wednesdays (same hours) Al, Cheryl, Joe Miller, sometimes Norma Amstutz, and I are there.

Doralee, Al, Maureen, Joe, and I have been volunteering for a long time. Cheryl walked in on July 28 of last year and asked to be put to work. That was an easy request to fulfill. At once she was handed some recently donated books on early Los Angeles history and requested to find the pages covering San Pedro history. She patiently read each volume, marking such pages.

Al and I spend a lot of time doing the acquisitioning and helping researchers. Maureen keeps our newspaper clipping files in order, filing each week and straightening the files used by researchers. It seems difficult for researchers to put things back where found. It takes three copies of the paper to keep our files up to date. Thanks to Al and Maureen, I am able to keep the files current. Joe is patiently organizing the negatives of the *News-Pilot*, a seemingly endless task. Norma files sports clippings and organizes document files. I have conducted four tours of the Municipal Building for the

students of the Port of Los Angeles High School with more to come.

Our resources are used for many reasons. The Port of Los Angeles, writers (history, novels, screenplays), students (mostly college ones), genealogists, artists, historians, etc. have come to us. Some come in for the fun of looking at photos of San Pedro's past.

We urge all members to visit us and see what resources we have. We also request the help of the community in saving material. If there is any doubt in your mind whether the item is worth saving, bring it to us and let us decide. We are excited over items that might surprise you. Recently we were given a badge of a Japanese-American cannery worker of 1940 (in addition to her annuals). Not only did it have her picture on the badge, the badge told us it had been issued by the American-Japanese League and gave their address.

Anne Hansford,  
Archivist



## The Society At Large



FIRST BOARD MEETING OF 2009. From left to right standing: Mona Dallas Reddick, Milton Heyne, Chief Financial Officer Jim Stanbery, Mary Jo Walker, the Reverend Art Bartlett, Robert Reddick, Sandie Van, Joy Weston, Anne Hansford, President Joe McKinzie, Vice President Donna Dragich. Seated left to right: Carolyn Scott, Georgia Cordero, Frank Anderson, Secretary Lorraine Ornelas, Mary Stanley. Board members not pictured: Irene Almeida and John Mattson. We'll try to catch them for a picture soon. Board meetings are usually held at the Muller House, 4:00 p.m., the second Monday of the month.



President Mary Stanley and Vice-President Elect Donna Dragich ride in the San Pedro Holiday Parade, December 7, 2008. Michael Grant drove the two in his 1965 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Ian Grant, his son, helped out with the waving.



Society members and friends pose for a professional group shot during the SPBHS visit to the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley.

### A Correction

In the last issue of the newsletter, Vol. 34:6, the WWI surplus building annexed to St. Peter's Church at the 10th and Mesa streets location was described as added in 1905. The correct year is 1922. Thank you, Jim Smith of Hollywood!

### Visit The Muller House Gift Shop

A great place to find china, vintage linens, curios, and the unexpected. Issues of the Society's publication *The Shoreline* are available at new reduced prices.

Open the first three Sundays of the month, 1:00 - 4:00 P.M.

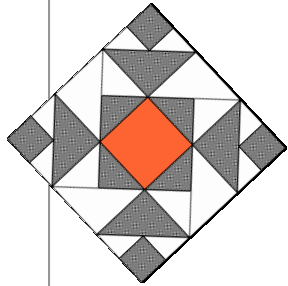
1542 So. Beacon Street, San Pedro



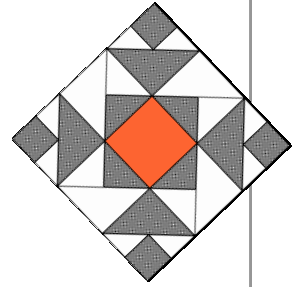
# It's Time for the Quilt Show At the Muller House!



1542 Beacon Street, San Pedro CA



## *The Midwestern Quilter* Hand-Sewn Quilts of Nellie Mae (Mary) McKinzie *From the Traditional to the Curious*



1920's to 2000



Sunday, April 19th

12:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Donation \$4.00 Includes House Tour



## Too Much Fun for Just One Day? Rummage Sale Now Biannual

THE RUMMAGE SALE at the Muller House, held in past years on a date in October, is now becoming a twice a year event. In doubling our efforts we gain valuable space for storing items as they accumulate and can display them better on the day of the sale.

We are now accepting donations for the first sale to be held on **SATURDAY, JUNE 6TH**. Please hold your major appliances, mattresses, sofas, and books for donating to other organizations. We no longer have the muscle power to deal with such heavy items.

Volunteers to price and sort donations are needed on Thursday mornings from 9:00 - 12:00 in the Muller House patio. Help with donation pick-ups is also requested. Please call Joe McKinzie to volunteer and get further information, 310-832-5234 or 310-701-6590.

You may drop off donations the first three Sundays of the month at the Muller House or call Joe McKinzie (see numbers above) or Frank Anderson at 310-833-9113.

San Pedro Bay Historical Society Newsletter  
Vol. 35, No. 1, January-February 2009

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Contributors: Anne Hansford, M. D. Reddick

Photos of holiday parade and group at Reagan Library courtesy of Donna Dragich.

Please send comments to the editor at SPBHS,  
P. O. Box 1568, San Pedro, CA 90733-1568.

Phone messages may be left at the Archives:  
310/548-3208.

To become a member of the San Pedro Bay Historical Society, contact the Archives for a membership form at (310) 548-3208, M/W 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., or pick one up at the Muller House, 1542 S. Beacon Street. The Muller House is open the first three Sundays of every month, except holidays, from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Quilt Show April 19th at Muller House  
Donations & Volunteer Help Sought for June 6th Rummage Sale  
See page 5 for details.

*San Pedro Bay Historical Society*

P.O. Box 1568  
San Pedro, CA 90733

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