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## HSSC's Quiet Cannons

by Patricia Adler-Ingram

Two ancient cannons have been reposing very quietly under the musicians' bench in the great room of the Lummis Home for about 45 years now. The smaller gun looks like a prop from a Hollywood pirate ship. The larger appears to be a "six-pounder" smoothbore field piece of about 1820-40. It bears no markings to indicate the country of origin.

Last summer we dusted them, photographed them, and measured them every which way, but failed to find a clue as to their history. We have now discovered an old letter of March 1891 and a newspaper clipping that tell at least part of the story.

The letter, dated March 9, 1891, is stamped in red with the frank of the Department of Arizona and with two stamps in purple; at the top, "Endorsement, Headqrs of Arizona", and at the close, "Brigadier General Commanding" beneath the signature, "A[lexander] McD[owell] McCook".

It states, "The Honorable Secretary of War being present at these Headquarters on this date directs the Commanding Officer of the Department of Arizona to take possession of the old iron Cannon referred to within and remove them to a place of safe custody. The Department Commander accordingly designates the rooms of the Historical Society of Southern California as the place of safe custody for these historical relics and they are not to be removed from the custody of said Historical Society without the orders of the President of the United States, or a future Secretary of War."

The letter was accompanied by a newspaper clipping

from the *Los Angeles Daily Herald* dated February 24, 1891 and a handwritten authentication signed, B. A. Cecil Stephens, Secretary, HSSC. This note states that the salvaged cannons were four in number.

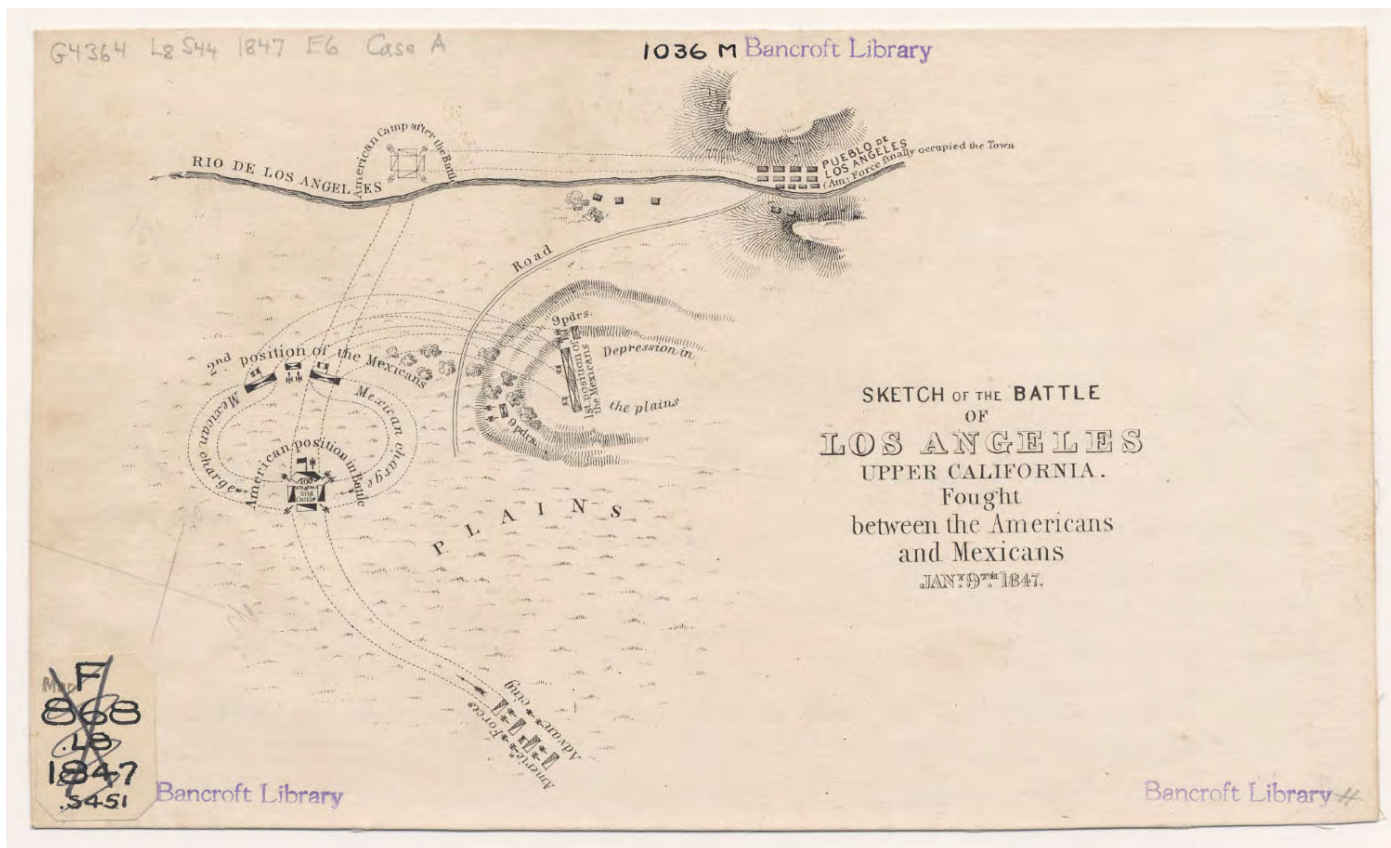
The story is headed, "The Old Cannon," and, "The Historical Society Will Take Care of Them," "They Were Fired All One Day And They Only Killed a Mule -- An Interesting Lot of Facts About Them."

The reporter's facts are problematical but are indeed interesting. We have posted both the letter and the clipping on our website. Go to <http://socalhistory.org/online-resources>.

A review of contemporary references to the historic day when artillery was fired at Los Angeles, at the Battle of the Mesa, January 9, 1847, shows the importance placed by both the attacking forces of the United States and the Californio and Mexican defenders on these primitive guns. In Hubert Howe Bancroft's account, *History of California*, Vol. V, 391 ff, the guns are noted at every stage of the hostilities. As the Californios, under Captain José María Flores took up positions for battle on a bluff skirting the San Gabriel River, two cannons were placed to command the ford. Meanwhile Stockton, tipped off by a friendly Californio, advanced a party of skirmishers with two guns on each flank to cross the river further upstream.



William H. Meyers. Watercolor: 1847.  
 Naval Sketches of the War in California. Limited Edition  
 1,000. Grabhorn Press, San Francisco. 1939.  
 The decisive battle for Los Angeles, depicting the repulse of  
 the Mexicans on the plains of La Mesa, 9 January 1847.



William Hemsley Emory sketch of the battle of Los Angeles Upper California fought between the Americans and Mexicans Jan. 9th. 1847.

Antonio María Osio, a Californio, in his book, *The History of Alta California; a Memoir of Mexican California*, continued the narrative from his point of view, writing, “Flores then advanced as close as possible in order to give his small cannon easier range and opened fire against the Commodore and his square formation. When the Commodore saw that his own artilleryman was missing the target he ran over and removed the man so he could aim and fire the gun himself.”

Commodore Stockton “demonstrated his excellent marksmanship by dismantling Flores’ best little cannon with his first shot. Flores took that as a sign of impending doom and decided he would either win or lose with one last cavalry charge. So he ordered one but, oh, what bad luck! A number of his subordinate commanders opposed or ignored his orders.” In the turmoil Flores surrendered the field and gave Stockton all the honors of victory. Stockton then entered Los Angeles with his band playing and flags flying. The cannons were retrieved and brought into town a little later. Col. Frémont subsequently accepted the formal capitulation of Andrés Pico for the Mexican and Californio forces at Campo de Cahuenga, signaling the end of United States hostilities in California.

Two of the cannons were carried in the parade celebrating the centennial of the founding of Los Angeles. An account appears in Dr. Joseph P. Widney’s introduction to *An Historical Sketch of Los Angeles County, California, 1876*. He writes, “two of the

old historic iron cannons of the Mexican War were rescued from oblivion, mounted and carried in the procession upon a truck. I attended to this myself.... For years afterward they stood in their mountings upon either side of the entrance to the Courthouse. They should be carefully preserved and not again lost.”

Since we have only two of the four cannons mentioned in the newspaper clipping, we wonder if all four were originally entrusted to HSSC. If so, should we launch a search for our missing guns?

Keep in mind that HSSC was moving its headquarters continuously in the first decades of its existence, packing its growing collections of manuscripts and artifacts from the old courthouse to a county warehouse and in 1913 to the galleries of the Museum of Natural History, where HSSC had expected to share tenancy after campaigning for its construction. It was a long and tortuous road with many a turning where treasures might have fallen away in the years before 1965, when HSSC found a haven at the Lummis Home. In fact, the real wonder may be that any of the historic materials that our earlier members collected still remains in our possession.

Let us know if you would like to help with our search for the missing cannons and our research to uncover the whole story of the guns before and after the battle when they “fired all day and only killed a mule.”



Board Member Eric Nelson (L) and HSSC member Brett Arena (C) entertain a visitor at the Lummis Home



## Holiday Open House

HSSC welcomed friends and members to the Lummis Home for its annual Holiday Open House. Guests kept warm with hot cider and enjoyed conversation by the fireplace. Local artist Heather Hogan decorated a pepper tree to commemorate the original tree Lummis had during his family's first Christmas in El Alisal in 1898. A good time was had by all.



Web monster Romualdo Valenzuela (L) and Office Manager Victoria Romero (R)



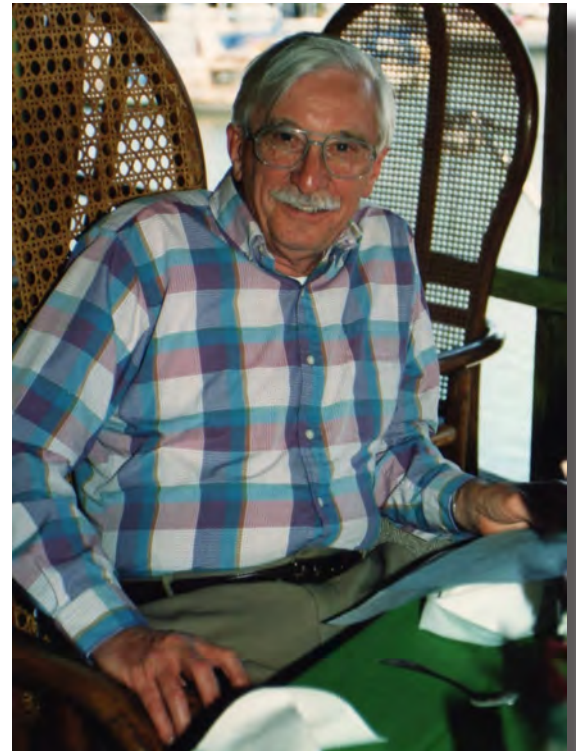
Former DA Gil Garcetti (L) and Lisa London (R)



Christmas pepper tree

# Robert Blew in Memoriam

HSSC lost a dear friend and colleague with the death of Robert W. Blew. Robert was an accomplished teacher and historian who volunteered years of his time to HSSC, helping to transform the Lummis Home and its bookstore into what it is today. He made a significant and lasting contribution to the Historical Society in organizing the Los Angeles History Conferences at the Autry National Center, selecting the themes, finding speakers and creating the programs. His service was invaluable and far beyond the call for an unpaid volunteer. Former HSSC Executive Director Thomas Andrews, who worked with Robert, said, “Had I stayed on longer, I would have created the ‘Robert Blew Volunteer Award’ to encourage others to rise up to his level of accomplishment. His presence made the staff and me feel less isolated and gave us the feeling of being a larger staff. His military stories and public teaching stories enlivened every lunch time. What I appreciated most was that he always came with his sleeves rolled up, ready to work, ready to contribute, ready to share in the discussions. The welcome of his presence was something I depended upon. And he came to work even when he was struggling with some illnesses. He never complained, he just showed up and quietly assisted us in a number of ways.”



# Discovery Tour

Art tours have sprouted up around the city, but the Arroyo Arts Collective’s Discovery Tour is one of the oldest — and most eclectic. Featuring a range of fine art and craft by both emerging and established artists, the Tour gives attendees the opportunity to discover and purchase amazing pieces of art and get a glimpse inside studios and homes that are just as unique as the individuals who live and work in them.

Northeast Los Angeles — or NELA, as the locals call it — truly is one of the city’s hot destinations for artistic talent. With a steady influx of galleries, restaurants, and boutiques, NELA attracts creative energy from across the city. In fact, NELA has a rich artistic history that dates back to the late 19th century when poets, writers and artists would gather at Charles Lummis’ “El Alisal” home on Avenue 43. Around the same time and just a few miles north, landscape painter William Lee Judson established the College of Fine Arts, University of Southern California.

1. Over 100 artists participated in this year’s Discovery Tour. Guests used maps to find their favorite artists and visit their studios.



2. HSSC’s resident troubadour Oscar Rospide delights visitors with spirited accordion playing.



3. Despite the rain guests lined up to purchase tickets.



# Dunning Lecture

by John O. Pohlmann

On the first Sunday afternoon in November, distinguished lawyer and historian Paul Bryan Gray delivered the annual George A.V. Dunning Lecture. His topic—also the subject of his forthcoming book—was “*Francisco P. Ramirez, 1837-1908: Emergence and Exile of an Early Advocate of Racial Equality.*” The audience of HSSC members and friends included students from my California history class at Cal Poly Pomona, whose candid reactions shared a remarkable consistency. They were impressed by both the speaker and his subject. To quote at random from their written reports, Gray was “enlightening,” “very interesting,” “enthusiastic,” “convincing,” and “very entertaining.” They especially enjoyed his subtle “wit and humor” but were also captivated by the significance of his subject.

Born in the sleepy pueblo of Los Angeles to illiterate parents, Ramirez managed to become both literate and fluent in three languages by age 14, which helped him secure his first job at the *Los Angeles Star* newspaper. During a lengthy journalistic career, Ramirez wrote for and/or edited and published over a half dozen newspapers in Los Angeles, Marysville, San Francisco, and Sonora and Ensenada in Mexico. At the age of only 18 years and 4 months—not 17 years as claimed by previous historians! as Gray vigorously reiterated—Ramirez established his own Spanish-language paper, *El Clamor Público*, in which he championed progressive causes between 1855 and 1859. Unfortunately, his demands for an end to slavery, education for women, and repeated calls for Mexican Californios to assert their political rights had little impact on a town dominated by conservative white “Chivalry” Southern Democrats. The rancho elite allied themselves with the Chivalry, and lower class citizens continued to sell their votes for a dollar and/or booze. Ramirez consistently defended blacks, Chinese, and Indians. As an example of Ramirez’s “extremely radical” views on race, Gray offered the following quote: “A dark skin may harbor beneath it a noble heart as well as a profound intellect.” On the other side, bigoted Chivalry Democrats joked about “free niggers and frijoles.”

Lacking sufficient popular support, *El Clamor Público* went bankrupt, but Ramirez continued his militant advocacy of civil rights as a newspaper editor in San Francisco and later as the only Mexican-American lawyer in Los Angeles (the brilliant autodidact was admitted to the bar after only 9 months of study). As a Republican activist, Ramirez was occasionally the beneficiary of political appointments, but his efforts to win elective office or

DUNNING continued on page 8



Lecture room in KCET Building



Paul Gray highlighting details in slide



Executive Director Patricia Adler-Ingram, Mr. & Mrs. Victor Ramirez, Paul Bryan Gray, and HSSC President John O. Pohlmann

# Urban Rancho

by James F. Carbone of “The Highland Park-Mount Washington Patch”

The first ever sustainable “Urban Rancho” garden party came to the Lummis Home in Montecito Heights on Saturday, Oct. 15.

Attendees got lessons in Natural Beekeeping from Kirk Anderson of Backwards Beekeepers, raising urban chickens with Reies Flores of The City Farm, organic vegetable gardening with John Lyons of The Woven Garden Habitat, gardening with Jeff Chapman of the Audubon Center and Bug Identification with Daniel Marlos of ‘What’s That Bug?’

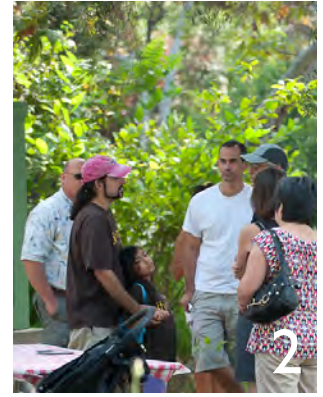
Sponsored by Council District One, the event raised funds to redesign and refurbish the water-wise gardens that surround the historic monument.

1. John Lyons of The Woven Garden Habitat talks about organic and edible gardening

2. Reies Flores of The City Farm talks about raising your own chickens

3. Habitat wall made by Katherine Parra

4. Local artist wearing stilts



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# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY

SPRING 2012 (vol. 94, no. 1)

## A Preview

SPRING  
2012  
Quarterly  
Articles

DIGGING UP THE REMAINS OF EARLY LOS ANGELES: THE PLAZA CHURCH  
CEMETERY  
BY STEVEN W. HACKEL

LOST IN TRANSLATION: FROM CALLE DE LOS NEGROS TO NIGGER ALLEY TO  
NORTH LOS ANGELES STREET TO PLACE ERASURE, LOS ANGELES 1855-  
1951  
BY CÉSAR LÓPEZ

BECOMING MEXICAN: SEGREGATED SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN  
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, 1913-1946  
BY DAVID TORRES-ROUFF

### THE HISTORIAN'S EYE

**Steven W. Hackel**, Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Riverside, is the author of *Children of Coyote*, *Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (2005) and editor of *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769-1850* (2010). He is the general editor of the Huntington's Early California Population Project, a database of all material in the Alta California missions' baptism, marriage, and burial records. He is completing a biography on the Franciscan missionary Father Junípero Serra.

**César López** is associate professor and chairman of the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at San Diego Mesa College.

**David Torres-Rouff** is an assistant professor of history at Colorado College. His research interests center on the connections between comparative racial and ethnic studies, public policy, and the urban environment. His forthcoming book, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power, 1781-1894*, will be published by Yale University Press.

HISTORICAL  
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CALIFORNIA

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY



# Dunning Lecture

DUNNING continued from page 5

party leadership were unsuccessful. Being an active and outspoken Republican in Los Angeles in the tumultuous decades following Americanization could be downright dangerous. A fellow party activist was shot to death, and Ramirez himself was once jumped from behind and physically assaulted.

That same year, 1880, a singular and uncharacteristic blunder brought an abrupt and dramatic change to Ramirez's life, after he foolishly vouched for another man's forged \$2,100 certificate. Arrested as an accessory to forgery, he jumped bail and boarded a steamer for Ensenada, where he struggled to support himself, variously editing a newspaper, teaching school, developing real estate or practicing law. At the age of 58 he married for the first time, eventually fathering 7 children. Frequently homesick, he was never able to return to Los Angeles, where newspapers at the time of his death in 1908 never so much as mentioned his name. Francisco P. Ramirez was buried in Ensenada in an unmarked grave, the site of which has never been located.

On the positive side, thanks to Paul Gray, Ramirez' great grandson Victor Ramirez and his wife traveled from their home in Seattle to attend the lecture. Kudos also to Board Member Paul Spitzzeri not only for a sparkling introduction for Speaker Gray but also for expertly rectifying a brief malfunction of the slide projector.

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# Save The Date

## January 21, 2012

Urban Rancho

## January 22, 2012

Afternoons at El Alisal  
4:30pm - 6:30pm, Members Only

## February 26, 2012

Afternoons at El Alisal  
5pm - 8pm, Members Only

## March 18, 2012

Afternoons at El Alisal  
5pm - 8pm, Members Only