

Notes From the Archive

Fall 2021

This is a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, a section of the History Department. If you are informed by what you read here, please share it with a friend or colleague.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS SELECTED BY THE STAFF

Seaver Center archivists selected items to share, and each piece represents a personal favorite or perhaps it strikes a note of timely relevance.

The 1,400,000 historic records maintained at the Center include manuscript

materials, books, serials, trade catalogs, pamphlets, broadsides, maps, posters, prints and 300,000 photographs. This material is available for research by historians, urban planners, filmmakers, students, genealogists and the general public.

To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate in 1920 L.A. by Kim Walters

I have had the opportunity to process the 2018 donation from the Historical Society of Southern California through a grant from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Apropos to our current pandemic and the discussions regarding vaccinations, I recently discovered a very interesting political brochure - concerning the 1920 Proposition 6 - in the Otto Zahn Manuscripts. Zahn was an influential Los Angeles politician during the early 1900s through the 1920s.

This very small, unassuming pamphlet was written by Judge Walter Bordwell titled "Judge Bordwell's Opinion of the Anti-Vaccination Measure" where he is addressed Measure Number 6 that was to appear on the 1920 ballot "in the ensuing election." The measure would have made changes to the State Constitution to prohibit vaccinations from being made as a condition of admission or attending a public school, university or other education institution. Judge Bordwell argued that such an amendment would hamper health officials in their efforts to cope with a pandemic such as an outbreak of smallpox, scarlet fever and other "horrible diseases..." It is interesting to note that vaccination discussions have not changed in a hundred years.

Walter Bordwell was a lawyer then later a judge on the Los Angeles Superior Court between 1910 and 1925. One of Bordwell's most publicized cases was that of the McNamara Brothers (James and John) who were accused and tried for the bombing and burning of the L.A. Times Building in October 1910.

Judge Bordwell's Opinion of the Anti-Vaccination Measure

Mr. Earl E. Hitchcock,
Principal Cornwell School,
Corner Sheridan and Cornwell Sts.,
Los Angeles, California.

Dear Mr. Hitchcock:

Referring to your telephone conversation this day regarding a communication that I had addressed to the Chamber of Commerce and later to the Board of Education, especially regarding Measure Number 6 as it will appear on the ballot in the ensuing election, I have to say:

This measure is a proposed amendment to the Constitution precluding the operation and passage of laws prohibiting compulsory vaccination under any circumstances.

If this measure were adopted by a majority vote of the people it would forbid the Legislature or boards of education or other governing bodies of any public institution of learning in this State, from passing laws or promulgating rules excluding pupils or teachers from attendance at school in times of outbreak of smallpox or other diseases

The California Compulsory Vaccinations Proposition, also known as Proposition 6, was on the ballot in California on Tuesday November 2, 1920. The measure failed! The election results were NO Votes: 468, 911; YES Votes: 359,987. Historical Society of Southern California Collection, GC-1383, Manuscript Series, Otto Zahn

controllable by any sort of medication. It is so worded that it would preclude the examination of pupils or teachers to ascertain if they were infected with any sort of contagious disorders such as lice, itch, ring worm, contagious sores, pink eye, diphtheria, tuberculosis, scarlet fever, infantile paralysis, smallpox and other diseases; or if, perchance, it were discovered that they were so infected, would preclude the requirement of any treatment for the correcting thereof as a condition to such attendance at school.

This is the very thing many of the proponents of the measure openly declare to be their desire and purpose. They are not willing to recognize that there is such a thing as disease or disorder which may be cured by remedial treatment. They are disposed to deny that vaccination would prevent smallpox or that any kind of preventive treatment would be efficacious as against the disease or disorders mentioned. If allowed to have their way, they would enforce their theories upon all the citizens of the State and allow smallpox and other diseases to run rampant through the community as it does in Mexico, causing untold suffering, death and patients who happen to recover, to be pock-marked or otherwise disfigured for life. It is their design that their children should be permitted to attend public schools even though they might be afflicted with, and spread among healthy children, the

most dangerous diseases. The protection of our homes against such iniquity demands the votes of the people against it.

But, say those who favor this kind of a law, "It is an invasion of our personal and individual liberties to require that our children should be vaccinated or otherwise treated to prevent contagion of vile diseases as a condition to our enjoyment of our public schools." This is nonsense. There is no law existing or proposed which would require children to be vaccinated if their parents do not wish it. The only law bearing upon the subject is that in case of outbreak or epidemic of smallpox, for instance, the children must be vaccinated or absent themselves from school during the existence of such epidemic. It is entirely optional with them. There is no invasion of individual liberty in this. Certainly it cannot be said with any show of reason that it is an invasion of individual liberty to require that a person who has been exposed to, or is infected with, smallpox or other contagious disease, shall not be allowed to mingle indiscriminately with his fellow men, thus communicating the disease to them. Such proposition on its face is odious and repugnant. It is one thing to claim the right to the exercise of private views on questions of health; but it is quite another thing to attempt to force those views on the public at large by enacting them into law and compelling them to comply therewith.

If those who are responsible for proposing this measure are allowed to have their way, we may expect epidemics of smallpox, scarlet fever, bubonic plague, cholera and other horrible diseases and wholesale deaths. And our health officers would, by this proposed law, be seriously hampered in their efforts to cope with the situation.

I enclose herewith for your information a copy of the communication sent to the Chamber of Commerce. The anti-vivisection proposition (No. 7 as it will appear on the ballot) is equally bad. Together, they constitute a vicious attack upon the public health and upon the governmental institutions whose function it is to protect the public health.

Very truly yours,

WALTER BORDWELL

The museum has a unique piece of original art that has long been on my go-to list of items to bring out and share during tours. It is a 5 x 10 inch watercolor sketch by 24-year old William Henry Jackson during his month-long visit to Los Angeles in April of 1867. The scene is a rare, distant view looking north enlivened in the foreground by the energetic appearance of wild horses driven by wranglers. By that time when the young Jackson came to town he had already completed his service in the Civil War. After departing Los Angeles he would gain prominence as a pioneering frontier photographer of the American landscape and live a long life until his death at age 99.



Manuscript File, MSS-514

Jackson chronicled his life through diaries, and from these published accounts one can pinpoint that he was running out of money, felt homesick and sought to return to his native New York state. His ticket out of town

was to get hired by Sam McGannigan and drive eastward herds of wild Spanish mustangs and half-breed Morgans on a profitable venture. His impulse to visually document his surroundings meant utilizing light drawing tools as he did not possess heavy photographic gear.

The drawing was donated to the museum in 1940 by the artist when he was 97 years of age and residing in New York City. The scene was reproduced in 2013 for the Becoming Los Angeles Exhibition.



A portion of William Henry Jackson's drawing as reproduced in Becoming Los Angeles.

Los Angeles, California, May 2, 1992 by Brent Riggs

Barbara Kruger's 1990 mural, *Untitled (Questions)* - then installed on the south facing exterior wall of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles - provided the backdrop for native Angeleno Gary Leonard's photograph,

Los Angeles, California, May 2, 1992. Kruger's work mainly addresses issues of social and gender justice, often by posing a question or a statement juxtaposed to a photographic image. In *Untitled*, however, Kruger poses nine questions with no graphic imagery. Leonard happened to be on Alameda Street documenting the Los Angeles Uprising and rioting in the aftermath of the acquittal of four LAPD officers in the Rodney King beating case, when three armed National Guardsmen on patrol crossed First Street in front of the mural. Repeated news broadcasts of a video of the King beating became a rallying point against police abuse of people of color, 28 years before video of the George Floyd murder did much the same thing. Unfortunately, the King verdicts led to massive looting and destruction instead of the organized protests that followed Floyd's murder, protests which came with some scattered, opportunistic looters.

Leonard's photograph of the Guardsmen created a visual that relates directly to several of the questions raised by the Kruger mural in the context of police use of force and the unequal enforcement of laws. The mural pointedly asks, "Who is beyond the law?Who is free to choose? Who does time? Who follows orders?Who dies first? Who laughs last?" The questions still wait to be addressed.



Aviatrix Amelia Earhart's 1928 Flight Log by John Cahoon

In 1928, just one year after Charles Lindbergh's historic flight, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to cross the Atlantic by air. Although she was a passenger, she garnered more attention than her male pilots and was praised for her bravery. In the years following Earhart went on to set many aviation records, became a writer and lecturer encouraging women "to try to do things as men have tried" and in 1932 became the first woman to solo across the Atlantic breaking Lindbergh's record. She was the most famous woman flyer of her time and beyond and is still remembered for disappearing over the Pacific in 1937 while trying to become the first woman to fly around the world.

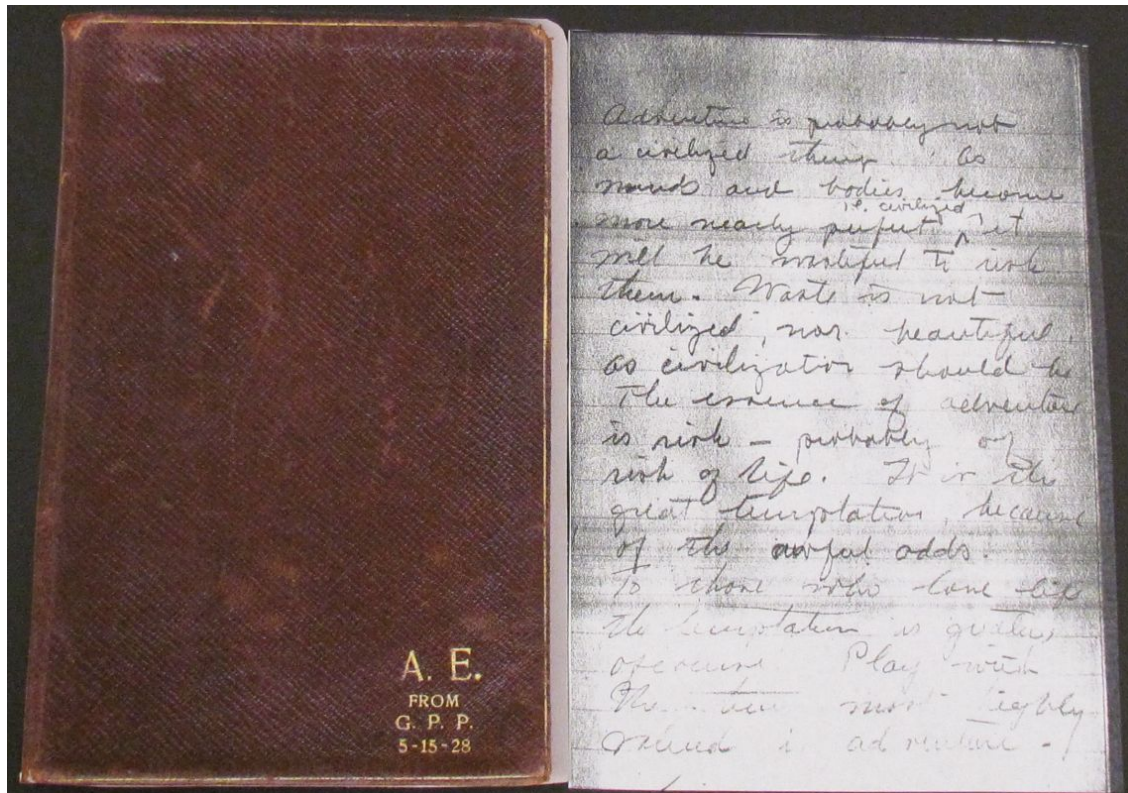


Amelia Earhart Collection, SCWHR-P-037-349

Being a passenger in 1928 allowed her to make observations and write comments on the flight in a logbook given her by her publisher, George Palmer Putnam, who became her husband. The flight log is part of the Amelia Earhart Collection in the Seaver Center. At the end of her log, she

wrote about the temptation of risk and adventure.

"Adventure is probably not a civilized thing. As minds and bodies become more nearly perfect (i.e. more civilized) it will be wasteful to risk them. Waste is not civilized, nor beautiful, as civilization should be. The essence of adventure is risk – probably of risk of life. It is the great temptation because of the awful odds. To those who love life, the temptation is greater, of course. [To] Play with the thing most highly valued is adventure." June 15, 1928.



Amelia Earhart Collection

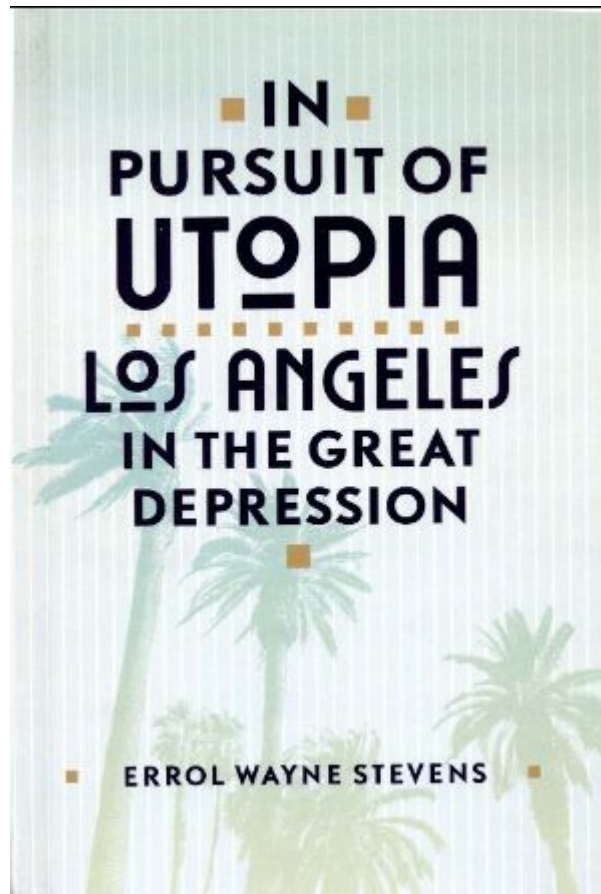
IN PURSUIT OF UTOPIA

Errol Stevens, former Curator of the Seaver Center, was memorialized in the [March 2020 issue](#). He was working on his next book prior to his death.

His wife Ellen along with NHM History Curator *Emeritus*, Tom Sitton, completed the manuscript, and *In Pursuit of Utopia* has been recently published.

The book is a history of the politics of despair in Depression-era L.A. Stevens explored why citizens endorsed "unworkable, even dangerous" radical movements that included the Utopian Society, Townsend's old-age

revolving pension plan, and Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California gubernatorial campaign. Publicity for the book concluded "In its illumination of a troubled time in American history not so long ago, this book offers insight into our own."



University of Oklahoma Press, July, 2021



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The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.

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