

VOL. 42

NUMBER 4

DECEMBER, 2001

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY CHORALIERS

have achieved an enviable International reputation. Recently, they won the Grand Prix at the International Festival of Choral Song in Miediedzyzdroje, Poland. In 1999, they were invited to take part in the World Choral Symposium in Rotterdam. This renowned chamber choir has been awarded such prestigious titles as "Choir of the World" in the 1991 International Musical Eisteddfod in Llangollen, Wales, continuing a tradition of excellence marked by first place awards in Den Haag, Holland in 1973 and Spittal, Austria in 1988,

The Choraliers sang at the First National Choral Symposium in Melbourne, Australia in 1986, and the International Workshops in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1991. They have performed in thirteen state, regional or national conventions of the American Choral Director Association and the Music Educators National Convention.

In 1994, the choraliers traveled to Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and Russia in a concert tour which culminated in their Grand Prix win in the prestigious Tallin, Estonia, Koorefestival. After performing for the ACDA National convention in Washington, D.C. in 1995, they won top honors in five categories at the Internationale Canto in Gorizia, Italy during the summer of 1996.

A WORD FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

At our Past Presidents Luncheon, the only past president unable to attend was Carolyn de Vries. I recently had a phone call from her and she told me she was recovering from recent brain surgery and expected a full

recovery! We wish her the best and much enjoyment of her new home!

Reading old Trail Blazers, I learned that the San Jose State University Choraliers frequently provided Christmas programs for our Christmas luncheon-but it has been a long time-so this year, the Choraliers return for our December 1 luncheon.

We will again, this year, invite our authors to offer their books for sale at our Christmas meeting. Books make great and lasting gifts and spread the story of our history.

We need some members to serve on the Sunshine Committee. You need attend no meetings to serve-a little time at home, sending a few cards per month and monitoring the newspaper for Sympathy Card recipients is all it takes.

See you all at the December 1st meeting. David

CHRISTMAS IN THE PARK; A SAN JOSE TRADITION

by Carol McCullough

(Prize winning paper June, 2001)

What began as a small Christmas display in front of a mortuary has become a San Jose tradition. In 1948, Donald Lima, Sr. erected a simple nativity scene outside his mortuary on Willow Street in San Jose. The original Lima display has grown into Christmas in the Park, an elaborate, popular collection of individual Christmas displays that draws thousands of community members to see it every year. The exhibit has endured location changes and heated debates. But it has survived the difficult times. In fact, decades after its humble inception, the display has continued to be an integral part of Santa Clara County Christmas festivities.

The Beginning

Donald Lima, Sr. was a showman in the wrong business. Well, perhaps not the wrong business, considering 1981 reports that showed that his mortuary was the 6th largest in California. But he didn't avoid attention or publicity -- at least that seems to be implied by his acquisition of a \$95,000 bus that played a 21-gun salute to honor deceased military personnel and his having a 30-foot windmill installed at Cedar Lawn Cemetery.

Don Lima had Santa Clara County roots. He was born in Palo Alto in 1923 and raised in the "Goosetown" area of San Jose (residents of "Goosetown" alone among San Joseans had permission to have livestock and fowl on their property). In a 1999 San Jose Mercury News article, Gus Lima said of his father, "He liked helping people. He had a huge heart."

By 1948, Lima had already established his own mortuary business on Willow Street in San Jose, having attended the San Francisco College of Mortuary Science.

That year, he decided to set up a Christmas display in front of his business establishment to give a more positive spin to the public's perception of a funeral home. Gus Lima remembers a photograph from that year in which his sister was in a manger as part of the nativity scene in front of the mortuary.

Originally just a nativity scene, the display expanded. Some of the displays were now animated. Lima found people to help make the characters displayed. Some were made, and some were bought. The original characters were, according to Gus Lima, "one-dimensional figurines;" eventually, "mannequins" were added. The figures were made of all different materials, including plastic. San Jose residents started contributing to the Christmas exhibit by providing displays of their own and helping with setup. Setting up the display was also a family affair: Lima's children Carly, Joe; and Don, Jr. were among those recruited to help. The display was stored in garages at the mortuary, and offsite storage facilities.

Native San Josean Edward Allegretti remembers the display from his childhood, having been driven to see it annually (starting in the 1960s) by his parents: "The mortuary was decorated with Christmas lights, while the nativity scene and other Christmas-type items were on the front lawn," he says, adding, "For that time, it was one of the largest Christmas light displays in town."

Ed Bautista of the City of San Jose was quoted in a 1999 San Jose Mercury News article as saying, "Everybody in San Jose went to this [exhibit]." Allegretti concurs: "It was well received by the community and it seems everyone

knew about it and drove over every year to see it." Regarding the way people learned about it, Gus Lima said, "It spoke for itself," says Gus Lima, "it was word of mouth." People would traditionally look at the trees and the lights in the Willow Glen Area, Lima said.

More and more people came to see the Christmas display -- so many that traffic became a problem, both for people who were just trying to pass through and for those who had business at the mortuary. There had even been some theft of display pieces. At the height of its popularity the display stretched two miles in either direction, according to Gus. It was after 1970 that Lima gave the exhibit to the City of San Jose.

A New Chapter: City Hall

Having outgrown its original location in front of Don Lima's mortuary, the exhibit was adopted in 1970 by the City of San Jose. Lima's displays were now showcased in front of City Hall. After quite a few years at that location, the exhibit was forced to become dormant because the city couldn't afford to run the display.

City Plaza Park

The exhibit could once again bring pleasure to Christmas revelers in 1980, when it was resurrected by a committee of volunteers. Aided by the city's Parks and Recreation Department, the volunteers gave it a home at City Plaza Park (now the Plaza de Cesar Chavez) in downtown San Jose.

In 1981, the city introduced its first holiday parade to accompany the display now known as Christmas in the Park. Since then, the parade has grown enormously, having expanded from an event boasting one band and a small number of floats to what, as of 1999, was deemed the largest Northern California holiday parade.

On December 6, 1988, Don Lima died of cancer, having seen his creation grow by leaps and bounds. Before he was buried, his funeral hearse transported him around the Christmas in the Park display.

The Creche Controversy

In 1994, the Christmas in the Park nativity scene was removed from the display and relocated to St. Joseph's

Cathedral, not far from the exhibit. Protest ensued in the form of thousands of calls and letters to the Christmas in the Park board; in contrast, just one phone call affirmed the decision. The office of Mayor Susan Hammer also received phone calls from people who were unhappy about the decision. A group of evangelical Christians expressed their disagreement with the creche's ouster by staging a "living nativity" scene in the Plaza de Cesar Chavez. Some citizens took to forming their own protest group called Citizens for Return of the Nativity Scene. Just before the board announced its intention to return the creche, group representative Deborah Kamboj told the *San Jose Mercury News* she planned to start circulating a petition to return the nativity scene.

As a result of the flood of protest, the board held a special meeting at Leninger Center on Thursday, December 1, 1994. After convening for an hour and a half and voting unanimously to revoke their previous decision, they announced that they would bring back the nativity scene. The nativity scene was indeed returned, but not to the southern end of the park, where it had stood for 15 years. Instead, it was placed inside the plaza (a less conspicuous location).

There seems to be some mystery surrounding the question of who was ultimately responsible for the decision. According to *San Jose Mercury News* reports, Mayor Susan Hammer said that she and her office had no part in the decision to take the nativity scene out of the display; however, she did ask her chief aide, Gary Robinson, to talk to Jewish leaders who had reservations about the idea of displaying the scene in the park. As it turned out, these Jewish leaders had not requested a meeting with the Board; rather, the board, a group of 26 volunteers responsible for organizing the annual Christmas display had invited Lil Silberstein, Ruth Sporer, and another Jewish leader in the community to attend a meeting in October to talk about the manger scene.

Although Silberstein refused to tell the *Mercury News* what she said at the meeting, the *News* reported that some board members said that input from Jewish leaders had

weighed heavily in their decision to remove the nativity scene.

According to another article, some active and former board members (all of whom refused to give their names) said they had been concerned about their ability to receive funding from the City if they failed to remove the nativity scene. These individuals, according to the article, claimed that Mayor Hammer's office did indeed have something to do with the decision to remove the nativity scene. A December 2 *San Jose Mercury News* article described Silberstein and Sporer as "close supporters of the mayor."

Another article from that paper, also dated December 2, says that "the board's decision to exile the baby Jesus from the city-owned park had drawn an endorsement from Hammer." Yet on December 1, the mayor issued a statement expressing her approval of the board's decision to return the creche. A December 3 *San Jose Mercury News* article quoted Sporer as saying she was "very disappointed" that the board had made the decision to reinstate the nativity scene. However, it seemed that the goal was tolerance and ensuring that people got along, as Silberstein said (quoted in the *Mercury News*), "I'm glad the issue has been put to rest for the moment. I think there is much room for greater understanding between people, between cultures, between religions and between races." In the same article, Sporer was quoted as saying, "I don't want people to end up saying that the Jews were the Grinch that stole Christmas."

Representatives from the Jewish community have not been alone in voicing objections to the nativity scene. A few years after the 1994 nativity uproar, the American Atheists began protesting. The protest followed an unmet request that the City and Christmas in the Park banish the nativity scene from the display.

The following year, a protest was held the day of the Christmas parade "in order to attract more attention and educate the greatest number of people," according to Dave Kong, California State Director of the American Atheists. The American Atheists were granted a display space in the scene (in the 2000 display there were trees decorated by

many different local organizations which included a solstice Tree.

Not too long before the creche controversy began, the City had bought a \$500,000 statue of Quetzalcoatl, a representation of an Aztec god, which was placed in the southern portion of the park. Knowing this just added to the ire some citizens experienced. A 1994 *Mercury News* article said, "Several religious groups opposed placing the statue in the park, saying it was a religious and pagan idol." In the same article, Kamboj (of the Citizens for Return of the nativity Scene) said, "A lot of us feel that, yes, we're a diverse city, but if they can have the Quetzalcoatl statue down there, why can't we have our nativity scene?"

Dan Pulcrano, who was publisher of Metro Newspapers in 1994, opposed using tax money to establish exhibits of a religious nature and rejected both the Quetzalcoatl statue and the nativity scene in the park.

In a letter to the editor in the San Jose Mercury News, Joe Lima (a son of the display originator) wrote: The whole issue of removing the manger scene from Christmas in the Park to another location because it is offensive is very many upsetting to me. The word 'offensive' bothers me. You may not believe in something, but to label it 'offensive' and automatically remove it is not right. The entire nativity scene takes up less than one percent of the Christmas in the Park display. What is the meaning of Christmas? Have we lost it? My father, Don Lima Sr., started the display at the Lima Family Erickson Willow Street location for the public's enjoyment. It was never his intent to use it as a religious statement. He donated the entire Christmas display as a unit, including the nativity scene, and the city of San Jose accepted it gladly. In the spirit of the original donation, I think it only fair to keep it intact. For those of other religious beliefs, I suggest that they display scenes of similar significance to them during their important holidays. To do so would be enlightening to those unfamiliar with non-Christian traditions and it might promote better understanding among us all. Let's return to the spirit of the season -- goodwill toward all.

It is clear that there existed (and probably still do)

powerful emotions on either side of the issue. Although it was impossible to satisfy everybody, the City listened to the majority response and acted on it. The community (at least those who felt strongly enough about the issue to call or write) wanted the nativity scene, and they got it.

Looking Below the Surface: The Symbiotic Relationship of Community and Display

Christmas in the Park reflects the playfulness of childhood, the excitement and anticipation of waiting up for Santa, giving and receiving gifts, playing with toys, singing Christmas carols -- all the things that say "Christmas" to anyone intimate with American popular culture. It also reflects the birth of Christ, which is for believers both a sacred mystery and the central meaning of the holiday.

Throughout the years, new displays have been added, including Victorian-style Christmas scenes, a Nutcracker display, elves, trains, characters from Mother Goose stories, miles of lights, and more. The Christmas in the Park display is not so notable for what it is but what it evokes and what it inspires in people. It has the power to bring adults back into a world of childlike innocence and simplicity — a stark contrast to busy Silicon Valley lives full of complexity, competition, entangling concerns, and mundane daily routines. Perhaps that's the real attraction of Christmas in the Park. Christmastime reminds that our busy workday cares aren't really as important as we think they are and helps us readjust our priorities.

Christmas in the Park can be seen as an escape and a sort of readjustment meter. The author of an uncredited 1994 *San Jose Mercury News* piece perceives a dichotomy in the world of Christmas in the Park:

There's something slightly surreal about Christmas in the Park: carols mixing with the roar of incoming jets, elegant hotels towering over rustic wooden displays — four singing skunks, three dancing dolls, a pair of parachuting penguins, but there's also something immensely charming about it, something that draws thousands of people into the chilly paths of Plaza de Cesar Chavez every night. Nothing brings far-flung, multi-cultured San Jose together like Christmas in the Park, to stroll, to kiss, to push phalanxes of

baby strollers, to sip hot chocolate and stare at the 30,000 lights....

The juxtaposition of the almost scandalously simple with the devastatingly sophisticated seems to jar the writer, but perhaps that simplicity is just the thing for which people long — and it seems they are especially reminded of their desire at Christmastime, when blessings are counted, when Christians contemplate the meaning of the holiday, and when there is a strong focus on family and friends and on doing things together.

Just as children in the 50s and 60s went with their families to marvel at the festive Lima Christmas displays, so did new generations of children. In a 1999 letter to the editor in the *San Jose Mercury News*, Hugh Smith tells of a Christmas adventure he had with his granddaughter:

One night last week, I took my granddaughter into town to see one of the movies at the Tech and to see Christmas in the Park....We got off at the Convention Center stop, and made it to the movie in time. Then we had an enjoyable evening seeing the lights, and buying a burger at Johnny Rockets, playing old tunes for only a nickel, just like in the good old days.

The tradition seems to facilitate a merging of the present and past. Seeing the lights and all the characters was, it seems, an activity that families shared when they visited the original Lima displays. Today, the display appears to retain that ability to draw families together for a festive celebration of Christmas.

One might be surprised that, because San Jose is such a big city, it could continue to present such a display. Perhaps it's because San Jose has a small-town heart even though it's not a small town: In a 1999 *San Jose Mercury News* letter to the editor, Hugh Smith of San Jose said, "A few years ago, I took a lady friend from L.A. to see Christmas in the Park. She was in awe. She said, 'In L.A., they could never do this, because people would steal it.'"

Although Christmas in the Park may seem idyllic — perhaps even perfect — it has not been immune to theft. In addition to the theft that preceded the display's bestowal to the City of San Jose, there was a notable incident in 1986.

That year, the taking of wheels from a parade float threatened to put a damper on parade festivities, but the docents from the San Jose Historical Museum who had been slated to stand on the float adapted by walking the route instead.

Although criminals have attempted to mar the smoothness and tranquility of the otherwise peaceful world of Christmas in the Park, the spirit of endurance has prevailed. This kind of attitude seems to fit with the zealous, almost patriotic fire of the sentiments expressed by the *Mercury News*' Barbara Vroman.

There's a story around town that one of the candidates for president of San Jose State last year walked out of the Fairmont Hotel, took one look at Christmas in the Park and dropped out of the running. If it's true, I say good riddance. Anybody who doesn't appreciate Christmas in the Park doesn't deserve to live here. Traditions are not easily shaken. It seems Christmas in the Park is no exception.

Although not a native of Santa Clara County as her husband was, Mary Lima contributed to what has become a San Jose holiday staple. Even after her husband's death, she was involved with securing finances for the display. Quoted in the obituary for Mary Lima, JoAnn Cymanski, her daughter, said, "It was their [Donald and Mary's] dream to see it one day fill the park — it's amazing how it grew." She continues: "Mom loved her city and couldn't do enough to make this just a wonderful place." What had started as a simple nativity scene has evolved into an elaborate presentation that cost, in 1999, a total of \$150,000 to \$180,000 to operate.

Now stored on Senter Road in San Jose, according to Gus Lima, the display boasted 70 individual animated displays and 200 decorated trees in 1999. In 1985, a mere twenty-five percent of the park was needed to display Christmas in the Park. By 1999, the display had expanded to cover the entire area. That year it was estimated that it took a total of 22,000 hours of volunteer work to put the display together. In 1999, it was estimated that about 400,000 people come to see the display.

Christmas in the park is more than animated charac-

ters and a nativity scene. it is the essenced of Christmas for San Jose, a long-standing tradition that, if the patterns of the past continue, will continue to enjoy longevity and popularity. It is the essence of Christmas in San Jose.
(For extensive bilbliography check San Jose Library)

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

Dues for the year 2002 are nowdue and payable. You may remit by mail or pay in person, but why stand in line if you can send it in and receive your membership card in the mail? Send our check in the amount of \$10.00 per member to Melita Kelly, Membership Chairman, 460 North 15th St., San Jose, CA 95112-1725. Your card or cards will be sent to you if you inclujde a self addressed stamped envelope. A number of you took advantage of becoming LIFE MEMBERS last year, and that option is still available for \$100.00 for a single membership or \$175 for married couples.

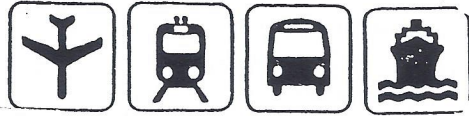
Just a quick reminder to ALL of our members. IF YOU ARE MOVING, please let us know or we cannot guarantee you will receive your *Trailblazer* if you move without notifying us prior to the deadline for submission to the editor. (one month ahead of the meeting.) We are also at the mercy of our mailing facility and the U.S. Post Office.

NEW MEMBERS

Evelyn D. Buffo	Marjorie Bauman
Margaret Bersano	Marilyn Diane Colson
Helen E. Conway	Susan Iris Drury
Shirley J. Fox	Rick Helin
LaVonne Howe	Stuart Campen Hall
Bill Hutton	Darlene Hutton
Sharon L. Knowles	Edwin C. Lanini
Kenneth Machado, Jr.	Franklin Maggi
Anna Pedersen	Robert Silverstein
Margery Ulrich	Terry M. Ulrich

GONE TO THE GOLDEN HILLS

Hazel Buchheister,	May 6, 2001
Madeline J. Smalley	May 23, 2001
Edward S. Pracna	July 30, 2001
Beatrice Merrill,	October 3, 2001



TOURING WITH THE CALIFORNIANS

Rose Crimi Muench -- Tour Director

Marie Rider -- Phone Reservations: 251-7887 M-F a.m.

Pauline Hawkins -- Treasurer: imntiol Jan 1, 2002-390 No.

Winchester Blvd. #7B, Santa Clara, CA 95050

After January 1 2002, Beverly Fisher will be our new Treasurer. Thereafter, please mail checks to Beverly Fisher, 3435 Yuba Avenue, San Jose, CA, 95117-2966.

Beverly Fisher -- Luncheon Registrations

REGISTRATION FOR WINTER TRIPS begins at the December 1 luncheon. Checks are preferred, or exact cash. Preference is given to Pioneers members to register at the luncheon and through the following week. Non-members and guests may sign up starting December 10. If you do not get a trip flyer at the luncheon meeting, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to our Treasurer.

PICK-UP POINT (unless otherwise indicated) is at Valley Village, 390 N. Winchester Blvd., Santa Clara, at the Dolores Street side.

TREASURER FOR OUR TOURS

Pauline Hawkins will retire December 31, 2001 as Treasurer for our tours, after four years of service. We thank her for her conscientious dedication to the job.

DECEMBER 8, 2001, SATURDAY

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS in ALAMEDA

Alameda is noted for its lovely old homes. We will visit five of these homes, all beautifully decorated for Christmas. A meet us and conduct our tour. Luncheon is included at the Encinal Yacht Club, where you can also visit their Christmas boutique. One of the homes on the tour will have a bake sale. Later in the afternoon, we will have tea and dessert at another of the homes. What a pleasant way to usher in the

holiday season! This trip is filled, but you may place yourself on a waiting list.

Leave: 9:00 a.m. Return: 5:00 p.m. Cost: \$ 53

DECEMBER 29, 2001 - JANUARY 2, 2002,

NEW YEARIS CALIFORNIA WINE COUNTRY CRUISE

This trip is filled, but you may place yourself on a waiting list.

TRIPS FOR 2002

JANUARY 22, 2002, TUESDAY, SAN MATEO COUNTY MUSEUM and the WOODSIDE GENERAL STORE

The San Mateo County Museum recently moved to the old Redwood City Courthouse. Built in 1910, this Imposing building features a stained glass dome and two-story Ionic columns. The collection illustrates 250 years of life in the mid- peninsula from Ohlone, Hispanic, and early American periods, plus the "Ships of the World" exhibit with 18 ship models. We will have a docent tour of the collection and the magnificent building. Lunch is on your own at the Courthouse Café next door. After lunch, we go to the Woodside Store, built in 1854 as a general store, post office, and community gathering place. Today, Woodside is better known as an affluent town, but during the Gold Rush it had 14 lumber mills providing virgin redwood forest lumber to build the wharves, houses, and commercial buildings of booming San Francisco

Leave: 9:00 a.m. Return: 3:00 p.m. Cost: \$ 15

FEBRUARY 26, 2002, TUESDAY

CHABOT SPACE and SCIENCE CENTER

Chabot Center, opened in August 2000, is situated on a wooded site in the Oakland Hills. Its focus is astronomy and space science. The complex houses an observatory with three telescopes -- the largest, 36 inch diameter -- a NASA Space Station and Mission Control simulator, Astronomy Hall, a planetarium, a Science Theater with a domed screen, and of course, a gift shop. Our visit will include a self-guided tour, a Planetarium Show, and a film in the theater.

Luncheon is on your own at the Celestial Café, serving soups, sandwiches, salads, and desserts. Usually our tours look back to the past; this time we have an

opportunity to look way up!

Leave: 9:00 a.m. Return: 4:00 p.m. Cost: \$ 28

MARCH 26, 2002 PREVIEW

Arrangements are under way to visit the Haas-Lilienthal House and the Octagon House in San Francisco. We will have time to stroll Cow Hollow's Union Street lined with old Victorians converted to boutiques, galleries, and restaurants. Details will be available in the Quarterly Trips flyer at the December 1 luncheon.

RAMONA and the MISSION TRAIL, PART II

APRIL 19 -- 23, 2002

In conjunction with Mary Lou Lyon's History Class, we will visit some different Missions from the last trip. Also, we will go to the San Bernardino County History Museum, the Southwest Indian Museum, the Lincoln Memorial in Redlands, and a guided tour of the beautiful Riverside Mission Inn, a National Historic Landmark. Fliers will be available at the December 2001 luncheon.

ROYAL BRITAIN JUNE 14 -- 26, 2002

Highlights include: London tour and a theatre performance, Windsor Castle, Stonehenge, Salisbury Cathedral, Bath, the Cotswolds, Stratford-upon-Avon, York, Edinburgh, Culloden Moor, Inverness, Isle of Skye, Glasgow, Stirling Castle, and more. The cost of \$2849 includes: round trip airfare, transfer to and from SFO with a minimum of ten passengers, and baggage handling. Optional cancellation insurance at \$110 allows for cancellation -- for any reason-- up to departure time. A current passport is required. Brochures are now available.

The Californians 2002 Trips Survey September 2001

The results of our September survey indicated the most interest in a River Barge excursion, European River Cruise, Georgia and South Carolina, and Lake Michigan. We expect to offer the River Barge excursion in September. We may have to carry over Georgia/South Carolina or Lake Michigan to the following Spring. Thank you for your contributions to the survey.

2001 OFFICERS CALIFORNIA PIONEERS
OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY

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* * * * *

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408-253-9514 **DEADLINE- for March Trailblazer February 1, 2002**

-15-

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2001
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