



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
October 2019

Welcome to Notes from the Archive, 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.

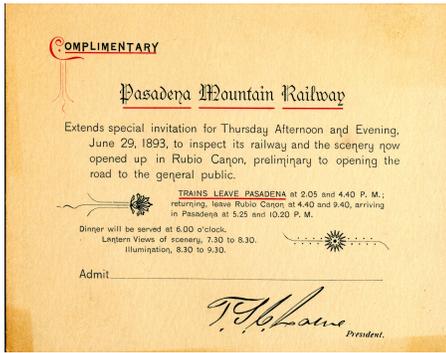
THE COLLECTIONS

Tracking down materials in the Seaver Center about the Mount Lowe Railway is a straightforward endeavor. An ample amount of paper items found in the Seaver Center reflect the heavy promotion that was responsible for the success of this popular tourist attraction. An even larger number of photographic images came out of these marketing efforts but also from a fascination for the feat of engineering of the elevated rails.



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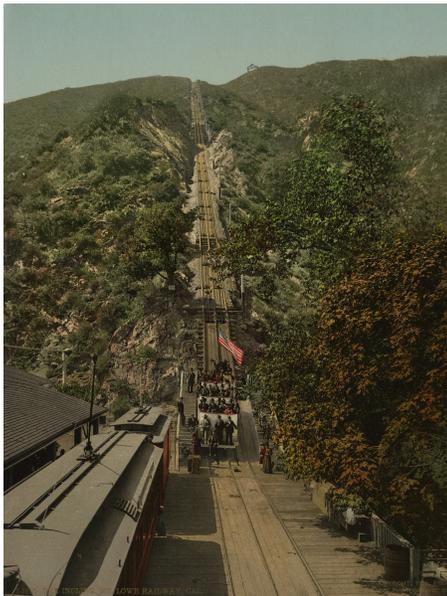
The Seaver Center holdings include two Mount Lowe collections, a manuscript (GC-1121) and a photographic (P-172), both acquired years ago from rare book dealers.



GC-1121-1-1

Mount Lowe images are often included in the work various photographic collections at the Seaver Center: Warren C. Dickerson, Adam Clark Vroman, H.D. Gibbins and particularly in the Frederic Hamer Maude photos. There is even a Thaddeus Lowe family photograph album, dated about 1895.

More images are fittingly found in the Postcard Collection which popularized tourist attractions. And our visiting researcher below came to appreciate even better the developmental history of Mount Lowe by studying the Incorporation Records.



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THE RESEARCHER



Kevin James is Professor of History at the University of Guelph in Canada. He has written three books and numerous articles, with recent research exploring global tourism history. Kevin is also co-editor of the forthcoming Oxford Handbook of Tourism History. He has appeared on several television programs in Canada and the UK. On a recent visit to California funded by the E. Peter Mauk, Jr./Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. Fellowship at the Huntington Library, he visited the Seaver Center to deepen his understanding of mountain tourism in late-19th and early-20th century California. Here he reflects on his exciting discoveries from the visit:

"Imagine the possibility of boarding a railway carriage at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains, and soon finding yourself rising 'Above the Clouds'! Such was the vision that inspired one entrepreneur in the early 1890s, and led to the construction of a marvel of engineering. It achieved great fame—even as it faced financial distress.

Striking postcards held at the Seaver Center from the railway's early years evoke the magic of the excursion, which began in Altadena, near Pasadena, and then transported passengers through the Rubio Canyon to a platform that was the starting point for a 'Great Incline' ride, which carried travelers aboard a separate railway to Echo Mountain and a range of tourist diversions. In 1896 another stage extended the journey on a narrow gauge track to the foot of Mt Lowe, where the storied 'Ye Alpine Tavern' offered entertainment and refreshment.

Articles of incorporation at the Seaver Center offer penetrating insight into the legal personality of a corporation and how the railway was organised as a business enterprise. In this case, the formal name of the company was laid out—the Pasadena and Mt. Wilson Railway Company (popularly known afterwards as the 'Mt. Lowe Railway')—as well its main purpose (to build and operate a railroad within the County of Los Angeles). The articles detail how its *raison d'être* was to be realised—by procuring rights of way, and by constructing and maintaining rail lines and associated infrastructure. They identify the place of business (Pasadena), the term of incorporation (50 years), and the number, names and residences of company directors, including the illustrious 'Professor' Thaddeus S.C. Lowe, who lent his name to a famous San Gabriel mountain, and is credited as the moving force behind this ambitious feat of engineering. The tourist railway opened with fanfare on July 4th 1893.

To the historian with an eye on how the money was solicited and ownership was structured, incorporation records document the capital stock of the corporation (\$600,000), the amount of capital subscribed (\$12,000) and paid up (\$1,200). Further financial details are revealed in an accompanying 'Statement as to Creation of Bonded Indebtedness', filed in Los Angeles County on November 5th 1892, which reveals how funds were to be borrowed to finance construction. It details a meeting the preceding October of directors and all stockholders; at this point the company created a bonded indebtedness of \$500,000 secured by a mortgage or deed of trust on all its property. In the end, bondholders were to be the original company's undoing, and the source of Lowe's personal financial ruin. These documents offer vivid insights into the creation of a mountain railway company with lofty ambitions. It soon faced an insurmountable new mountain—of debt. Within a few years the \$500,000 in interest-bearing bonds which financed the railway were an insufficient source of stable capital.

The company was reorganised, its name slightly altered in the process. Lowe details the railway's extensive financial difficulties in a publication entitled "Inside Facts concerning the Pasadena and Mt. Wilson Railway Company, Popularly Known as the Mount Lowe Railway, Compiled for the Inspection of Its Bondholders and Friends," a rare copy of which is also held at the Seaver Center.

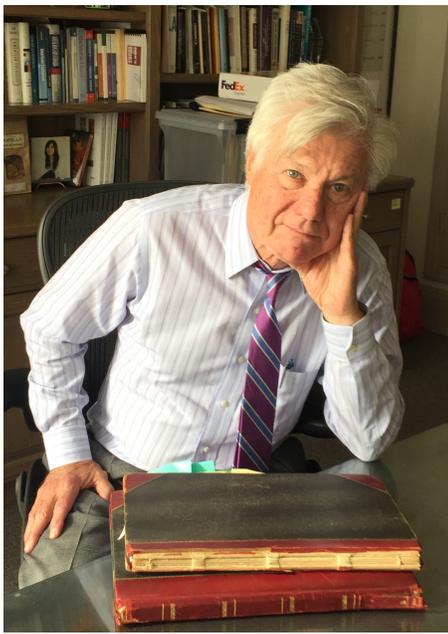
In 1897 a judge adjudicating a suit brought by bondholders against the railway lamented that Lowe's ingenuity had been compensated not with reward, but rather 'financial disaster'. Such was the depth of his personal hardship that in 1899 Lowe surrendered his stately Pasadena home, on

the city's fabled 'Millionaire's Row', to a creditor. Eventually the railway became part of Henry E. Huntington's Pacific Electric Railway. Lowe died in penury in 1913, ending a long life marked by remarkable exploits and creative ideas, even if his final, bold vision resulted in personal privation."

THE RESEARCHER IN THE NEWS

It is gratifying to see the tangible result of work completed by a visiting researcher. Most often those results come in the form of a published book. But a recent discussion on the KPCC public radio program, AirTalk, offers a measurement of how our resources informed Darryl Holter about the nascent automobile industry in Los Angeles at the start of the 20th century. He was interviewed by Larry Mantle, along with Leslie Kendall of the Petersen Automotive Museum, about the manufacturing and retail history of the automobile.

<https://www.scpr.org/programs/airtalk/2019/09/25/64926/socal-auto-historians-go-under-the-hood-of-la-s-ri/>



Historian Darryl Holter



Plan your research visit

Call 213.763.3359 or

Email seavercenter@nhm.org

Open by appointment

Monday and Thursday

10-noon and 1-4 p.m.

The Collections

[Search the Online Archive of California](#)

Over 370 general collections
Over 290 photographic collections

Digitized Collections

[Search over 29,000 images](#)

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.

Upcoming Events Around Town

****The Archives Bazaar, Saturday, October 12th, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.****

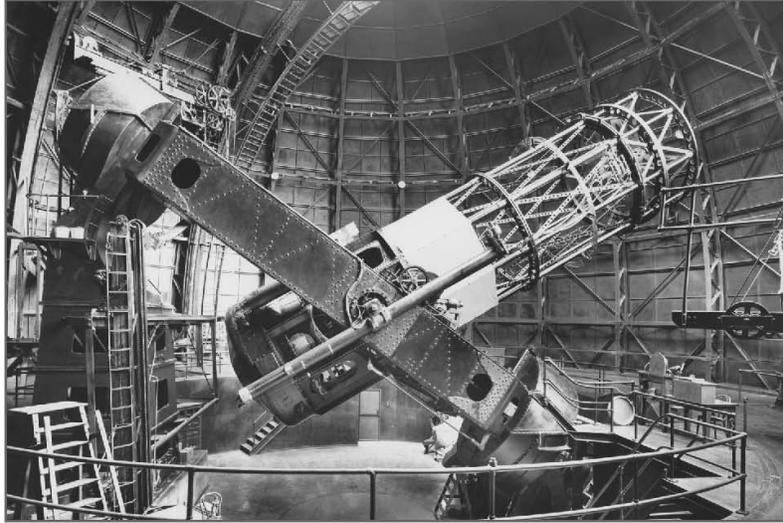
****The La Crescenta Valley New Year's Flood of 1934: Life During the Great Depression in Southern California, featuring Darryl Holter, Saturday, October 26th, 2 p.m.****

14th-ANNUAL

ARCHIVES BAZAAR

PRESENTED BY

L.A. AS SUBJECT



**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2019. DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY.
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.**

THE STORIES OF L.A. ALL DAY. ALL IN ONE PLACE.

USCLibraries

laassubject.org

Join us for a free historical discussion on...

THE LA CRESCENTA VALLEY NEW YEAR'S FLOOD OF 1934 LIFE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Join local artist and author **Darryl Holter** for the premiere screening of his video commemorating the La Crescenta Valley New Year's Flood of 1934, "Los Angeles New Year's Flood: In Song and Video." This video features Darryl singing Woody Guthrie's Los Angeles New Year's Flood and includes archival images provided by the Natural History Museum's Seaver Center for Western History Research. Images of the flood from the Library's Glendale History Room will shed light on the history of the flood and its impact on local residents and communities. **Holter** will also share additional Woody Guthrie songs and stories from Guthrie's time living in Los Angeles.

A drawing will be held with gift baskets courtesy of the Natural History Museum.



SAT
OCT
26
2:00 PM

Hosted by Glendale Library, Arts & Culture Department
and the Natural History Museum



**GLENDALE CENTRAL
LIBRARY-AUDITORIUM**
222 E. HARVARD STREET
GLENDALE, CA 91205

*Visitors to the Glendale Central Library receive 3 hours FREE parking across Harvard Street
at the Marketplace parking structure with validation.
Handicapped parking is available on the east side of the building.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT 818-548-2021

www.GlendaleLAC.org



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