

MUSEUM MUSINGS



Monrovia Historical Museum

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Mark Still, Former Curator, Is Laid To Rest

By Pam Barkas

On Wednesday, March 18, Mark Still, former curator of the Monrovia Historical Museum, was brought back to Monrovia by his family to be laid to rest at Live Oak Memorial Park. For Mark's wife Peggy, it had been a numbing nine days since Mark's death. There were two farewells to plan: one in Santa Maria, where Mark had died, and the one in Monrovia where he was to be buried. There was the uncertainty of the weather and the coronavirus affecting travel and gatherings. And sadly, the Monrovia Restaurant, where the luncheon was to be held, closed, leaving the funeral party with nowhere to meet after the interment.

But Monrovia came through for Mark for the many times he had come through for Monrovia. The rain held off, the sun came out along with 45 friends and family, and the museum that Mark saved from oblivion hosted the group after the short ceremony at Live Oak. Among the people who came to honor Mark at the interment while maintaining the required social distance were Mayor Tom Adams, members of the Monrovia Historic Preservation Group, Ralph Walker, who had assisted Mark with several museum programs, and, from the museum, Denise Trentalange, and Pam Barkas.

After the interment, some friends and family came back to the museum for luncheon, continuing to follow safety guidelines with four people at each table meant for eight. Some of Mark's family and close friends had never seen Mark's work at the museum, so Denise Trentalange provided booklets using Mark's illustrations and notes showing how much research and detail went into each one of Mark's exhibits. Pam Barkas put up cards with Mark's name next to each exhibit Mark had crafted.



Mark and his wife Peggy

(Mark Still continued)

Mark made the museum a place where children can see what it was like to sit in a turn-of-the last century classroom and kitchen. Visitors can view an exhibit of the Native Americans who lived in the area that was to become Monrovia. He designed and built exhibits that represent events in American history from the perspective of Monrovia.



Mark and Ralph Walker at the Colonel Allen Allensworth event

He also planned and, with wife Peggy, hosted events on historical people associated with Monrovia such as Colonel Allen Allensworth and Tuskegee Airman LeRoy Criss, as well as cultural events to celebrate Black History and Latino Heritage months. Mark reached out to partner events with the Monrovia Historic Preservation Group, the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians, the Patriot Guard Riders, and the Monrovia/Duarte Black Alumni Association.

Mark and Peggy made sure that events always ran smoothly and professionally.

Though Mark certainly deserved and would have appreciated a stipend for his master craftsmanship and the hours he spent as a docent, he knew the museum could only afford to pay for the materials he used. So, helped by good friend Mike Courtright, he labored on the exhibits that will be Mark's legacy to Monrovia.

WORKING WITH MARK— A GIVING MAN WITH A VISION

By Denise Trentalange
Collections Manager

Many years ago Steve Baker asked me, over lunch at the Monrovia: Could I work with Mark Still if he was made the Curator of the Museum? I had been working on the accessioning of donations received on a weekly basis and trying to make the displays informative. It was a no brainer. YES!!!!

Mark had a vision for the Museum, one that would reflect the history of the people, one that would draw the public in through the updated exhibit space and programs. Mark accomplished that and made the Monrovia Historical Museum, one of the best small city historical museums in the western United States.

Members of other museums would visit us to see the progress Mark was making and to pick his brain. We would invite other Historical Museums to gather with us to discuss best practices for all of us. We visited other Museums to see what they were doing with their exhibits. The Monrovia Historical Museum was by far the largest small city museum not only in space but also by its overall collection.

(Working With Mark, Continued)

Much of the collection had languished for years in storage. Mark was able to review the artifacts, visualize displays and bring them to fruition.

Mark was so selfless, always giving everybody but himself credit for their work. He would always introduce me as the person who kept him honest and made things happen behind the scenes. He also insisted that I should be known as the Curator of Collections. He was such a gentleman.

There are so many memories of Mark and his work around the Museum. One of my best memories involves a group of children from Bradoaks School who would visit each Thursday afternoon after school. It started with two girls from the school who ventured in one day, and Mark gave them a tour. In the following weeks, the two original students were accompanied by two other students and then a few more. Each week, the first two original students would give their friends a tour, mimicking Mark's delivery from their first experience with him. Mark designated them as junior docents and gave them tasks to complete. Then one week, no one showed up. We found out the students were supposed to be at the Boy's and Girl's Club for after school programs all that time, but they had been skipping out and showing up late at the Boy's and Girl's Club. So that was the end of the Junior Docent Program. I'm not sure who was more disappointed, Mark or the kids.

Not only could I work with Mark Still, but it was a great privilege and experience. He will be missed hugely.



Mark being honored by the Monrovia City Council for all the work he had done on the museum. From left: Tom Adams, Larry Spicer, Mark, Gloria Crudgington, Becky Shevlin, and Alex Blackburn

Monrovia's Newest Celebrity Uncovered

By Pam Barkas

Monrovia has had a number of famous people associated with it over the years: writers, athletes, politicians, and now an inventor. Sandra Miller, a journalist, has contacted the museum. She and her co-author Margaret Muirhead are writing the history of one of the most famous inventors very few people have ever heard of...**Eleanor Abbott**.

Drawing a blank? What about **Candy Land**, the board game? Apparently, I had a deprived childhood because I don't remember ever playing it, but when I checked with other board members, I learned that **Candy Land** is still a popular game played by younger children.

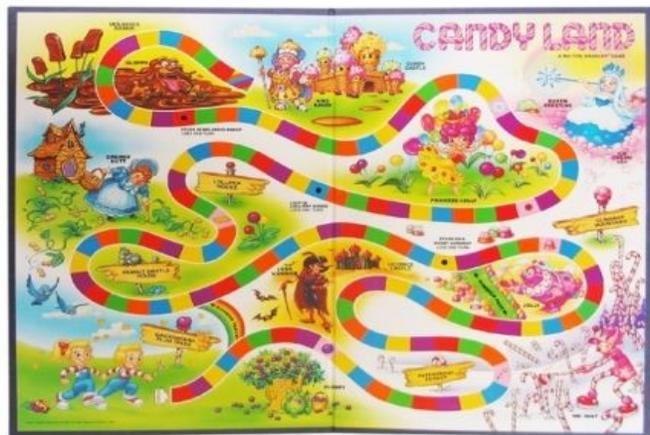
[Eleanor Abbott](#), her sister Betty Ann, and their parents originally came from Ontario, Canada, to Port Huron, Michigan, in 1919, but established their jewelry business in Alameda County. By 1927, the family is in Monrovia, living at 164 N. Encinitas Avenue. John Weaver Abbot, Eleanor's father, is running his jewelry business from 314 S. Myrtle Avenue.

In the 13 years the family is in Monrovia, they reside at several different locations but live the longest at 226 E. Foothill Boulevard. The house still stands next to Clifton Middle School but is fronted by a business structure.

It isn't clear what Eleanor Abbott is doing in the years from 1931 when she graduates from Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte High School until 1940 when the family relocates to San Diego. The 1931 high school yearbook indicates she was a member of the Writers' Club and World Friendship Club for two years, but her future plans are "Undecided."

When the family relocates to San Diego, Mr. Abbott continues his jewelry business. Sometime around 1948, Eleanor Abbott contracts polio and is quarantined in a San Diego hospital. During her quarantine, she comes into contact with children who also have polio, and that is when she comes up with the racing board game, Candy Land, a simple game that doesn't involve decision making and not much counting. This makes it very attractive to younger children.

Milton Bradley purchases the rights to the game in 1949, and it soon outsells the company's previously most popular game, Uncle Wiggly (which I do remember playing!). The game is responsible for making Milton Bradley competitive with Parker Brothers, which had introduced Monopoly in 1935 (the game was invented in 1903). Through Wikipedia, I learned that Candy Land was voted the most popular game of the decade of the 1940s by the Toy Industry Association. Over the years, the game undergoes updates and changes from the original. In 2005, the game was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame.



(Eleanor Abbott, Continued)

Eleanor Abbott survives polio, and a 1948 directory indicates she is working as a watch representative in San Diego. Neither she nor her sister seems ever to have married, and Eleanor Abbott dies in 1988 in San Diego.

We hope that Sandra Miller and Margaret Muirhead can uncover more about Eleanor Abbott and her family. If any of you out there have information on the family and/or who own one of the early versions (early 1950s) of the game, please contact us at monroviahistoricalmuseum@gmx.com

Exhibit Committee Report – Spring 2020

By Sarah Farmer Earll

With the temporary closure of the Museum, few guests had a chance to see our newest exhibit, **Women and Elections in Monrovia** – Commemorating the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage in the United States. This display highlights some key “firsts” in Monrovia’s civic life.

DID YOU KNOW?...

- ◆ Women active in the temperance movement instigated the town’s incorporation in 1887 in an effort to curtail the sale of liquor, six years before prohibition was adopted nationally.
- ◆ In 1902, the six men elected as library trustees decided they were not really qualified, and promptly appointed their wives to the positions. This was one way of putting women into public office since they were still disenfranchised.
- ◆ California granted women the right to vote in 1911, long before the 19th Amendment established national women’s suffrage in 1920.
- ◆ The first female police officer in Monrovia was Zella L. Vining, who was appointed in 1918
- ◆ Until 1978, the Mayor was appointed from amongst the city council members. The first person elected as Mayor was a woman - Patricia Ostrye. At that time, nine women were leading Monrovia’s civic life:
 - Pat Ostrye, Mayor
 - Hilda Herb, City Treasurer
 - Gwendolyn Collier, Superintendent of Schools
 - Kristin Helmuth, President of the Board of Education
 - Mimi Mency, School Board Member
 - Linda Proctor, School Board Member
 - Jan Marugg, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce
 - Wanda Weatherman, President of the Chamber’s board
 - Jayne Bellin, President of the Board of Realtors

Women and Elections in Monrovia Exhibit



Installation assistance from volunteer Nate Bernstein

(Exhibit Committee Report, Continued)

This exhibit also features a quilted wall hanging made by the Museum Foundation's vice president, Betsy Woodford. The quilt incorporates symbolic shapes and colors associated with the women's suffrage movement, pieced together to create a bold and striking display.

While this exhibit is designed as a temporary display, it will remain available for viewing after the Museum reopens to the public.



The postponement of this summer's Olympic Games in Tokyo caused us also to delay our exhibit **Celebrating Monrovia's Olympic Athletes**. We enjoyed great participation with the families of these athletes, and look forward to bringing this exhibit to life in the near future.

Stay tuned to our Facebook page for exhibit opening and other information:

<https://www.facebook.com/monroviahistoricalmuseum/>

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Membership & Donation Information

At the Monrovia Historical Museum we keep the story of Monrovia alive. Our 8,000 square foot museum consists of two wings that introduce guests to the origins of the city founded by William Newton Monroe in 1886. Our displays depict life in the growing city as well as exhibits covering the local Native American groups, natural history, Monrovia through the World Wars and so much more!

Your membership and support helps us to continue to tell the story of Monrovia. Without our members we wouldn't be a resource for school groups, citizens researching their history and individuals who just want to learn a little more about what makes Monrovia the city it is today. **Memberships can be paid online through PayPal** on our website <https://www.monroviahistoricalmuseum.org/become-a-member.html> . Prefer to make a one-time donation? Go to <https://www.monroviahistoricalmuseum.org/donate.html> .

Or you can fill in the information below and mail it along with a check to the address listed at the bottom of the form. Once the museum reopens (closed due to COVID-19) you can drop it off at the museum any **Thursday or Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.** . The Monrovia Historical Museum Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation.

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One Year Membership (circle one): Student/Senior: (55+) \$15 Individual: \$20 Family: \$30 Supporting Member \$50: Sustaining Member; \$100: Business Sponsor \$250 **Or a one-time donation in the amount of \$ _____**