

MUSEUM HILL — BEFORE THE MUSEUM — This photograph was taken in May of 1913 showing the road up Museum Hill as construction was beginning on the foundation of the famed Southwest Museum. The picture was taken from the present site of the Santa Fe tracks near Marmion Way and Museum Drive.

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Southwest Museum groundbreaking

Mark 55th anniversary

Highland Park, 1912-1913

Nov 16, 1967

By Roger Swanson

A silver shovel crunched into the ground on a Highland Park hilltop 55 years ago today, marking the beginning of construction of the Southwest Museum, an enterprise that has gained world fame through its study of the southwest and vast collection of Indian artifacts.

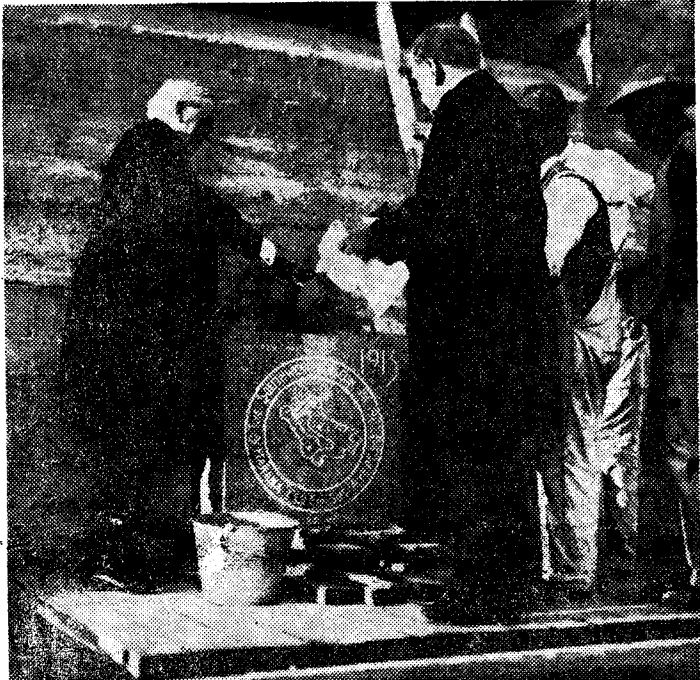
It was on Nov. 16, 1912 that groundbreaking ceremonies were conducted atop Museum Hill, a 38 acre site purchased in 1907 by the Southwest Society, parent organization of the museum.

The \$50,000 needed to buy the hilltop site had been raised by Henry W. O'Melveny, a distinguished Los Angeles Attorney, and a few wealthy people who were persuaded to back the new venture.

The cornerstone was laid in 1913, the building completed in July of 1914, and soon afterward the museum's growing collection was taken from the Hamburger building (May Company) at Eighth and Broadway where free storage had been granted.

STAGGERING DEBT

Hector Alliott, curator, upon completion of the building, said possession had been taken of "the grounds, building and a staggering debt." Unforeseen building costs had increased construction of the museum to \$80,000 — \$30,000 more than the \$50,000 building fund request from Carrie M. Jones.



CORNERSTONE — Bishop Conaty (left) and Lt. Gen. Adna R. Chaffee, first president of Southwest Museum, participated in the laying of the museum's cornerstone in 1913, several months after ground was broken for construction.

Southwest museum story

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and the Southwest."

The first officers were Lt. General Adna R. Chaffee, president; Joseph Scott and Mrs. Clara B. Burdette, vice presidents; Charles F. Lummis, secretary; and W. C. Patterson, treasurer.

Incorporation of the Southwest Museum was the result of four years work by its predecessor organization, the Southwest Society which was founded by Charles Lummis, a dynamic crusader for the southwest. He started the society in 1903 as a branch of the Archeological Institute of America.

The society grew rapidly under Lummis' direction. It assembled and transcribed 450 old folk songs of California and the southwest. It bought the Palmer-Campbell collection of California archeological material—largely tools and vessels of the Gabrieleina Indians—and the Caballeria collection of California mission books and paintings. Meetings were conducted in the now fabled Lummis home, El Alisal, at Ave. 43 near Figueroa St., and in the Pacific Electric Building where the collection was housed before its transfer to the Hamburger Building.

BEST LOCATION

Lummis announced to the group in 1907 that "the scientifically most valuable collection west of St. Louis" had been acquired by the society. He also announced that the society had secured a site of "38.69 acres which is believed to be the most beautiful location in this country."

The site chosen by Lummis

was a Highland Park hilltop, another Acropolis, in the mind of the society's founder. Lummis was following the Greek tradition which calls for monuments to be built on hilltops rather than on flat lands. Climbing to the top of the hill, Lummis could see the San Gabriel Mountains to the north, the Los Angeles River turning out of the San Fernando Valley, encircling mountains, and far off, the Pacific Ocean.

Important work was accomplished in the five years between incorporation and groundbreaking, including the acquisition of the important Munk Library of Arizona and Lummis' gift of his valuable historical library and collections which had been gathered during 25 years.

SMALL BEGINNING

It was only a small beginning, the passing years have shown. The museum has been modernized during its half-century and its growing importance to researchers has levied new demands, especially on the museum's library which is widely used for reference material by Hollywood film companies.

Early this year the library's board of trustees announced plans for a new library to be built just above the present library, housed for the past 30 years in Torrance Tower. The multi-level building will house approximately 200,000 volumes.

Librarian Charlotte T. Tuffs said the museum is now raising funds for library construction, hoped to begin sometime next year. Approximately \$1 million is needed.

One of the museum's important field work has been done by Dr. Mark R. Harrington, who retired two years ago at the age of 83. Dr. Harrington came to the Southwest Museum in 1928 with a background in anthropology and experience with the American Museum of Natural History, the Peabody Museum of Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Heye Foundation Museum of the American Indian.

Dr. Harrington's greatest find—and greatest thrill—came in a Nevada cave. The objects he dug up proved that man had lived at the same time as the now extinct ground sloth and

the prehistoric horse and camel.

DART POINTS

Dr. Harrington said he found points of darts that had been used before the invention of the bow and arrow.

"At least 10,000 years old," Dr. Harrington said. "They were found among bones of the sloth. And since it was a very dry cave, we found some hair and claws of the sloth that had been pretty well preserved."

Other important work of the museum has been conducted at Borax Lake and Little Lake, California, showing the area to have been well peopled thousands of years ago. At Tule Springs, Nevada, Dr. Harrington unearthed ancient campfire refuse that established the man-occupied site to be almost 30,000 years old. This discovery doubled the then known age of man in America, and helped win for Dr. Harrington national honors and in 1956 an honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities from Occidental College in recognition of his years of work in anthropology and archaeology.

With the 1965 retirement of Dr. Harrington, the duties of curator were assumed by Bruce Bryan, assistant director of the museum.

Never retired, however, is the constant quest for knowledge and more knowledge of the southwest, the driving credo first forged in the dedication of a few men 60 years ago.

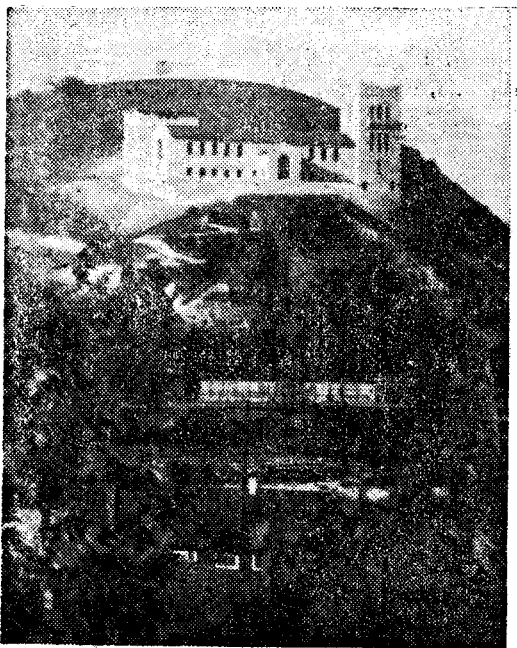
The Southwest Museum opened its doors on Aug. 3, 1914, bringing to the public the history of the southwest.

So vast now is the collection that the museum is able to display at one time only 20 percent of it, according to Dr. Carl Dentzel, director of the museum since 1955.

The official birth of the museum preceded by five years the groundbreaking for the building.

On Dec. 31, 1907 California State Secretary C. F. Curry sent a telegram to Charles F. Lummis of Highland Park which read: "Southwest Museum Filed This Date Certificate Issued."

A small group of dedicated residents gathered three days later to elect officers to fulfill their dream—"the founding, erecting and maintaining of a free public museum of science, history and art, for the benefit of the people of Los Angeles



ALONE ON THE HILL — This photograph taken Nov. 29, 1914, a few months after its opening, shows the Southwest Museum sitting alone on its hill. Millions of people have visited the famous cultural center in the past 53 years.