

Grace
Dee May


MUSEUM &
LIBRARY

ILLUMINATIONS

MARCH / APR 2023

**"First & Foremost
in Los Angeles History"**

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**A Salute
to Los Angeles'
First Firefighters**

Grace Dee May Museum & Library • 665 W Jefferson Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90007 • www.gracedeemay.org

ILLUMINATING THE LEGACY OF THE WEST

Grace Dee May

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In 2004, Audrey Marie Stein established the Grace Dee May Museum. Audrey believed that she had been richly blessed by the **Grace** of God. Audrey's nickname was **Dee** and she had been born in the month of **May**. So, as Director of the Foundation, she named the Museum the **Grace Dee May**.



MAR / APR 2023 ILLUMINATIONS

*"A hero is no braver than an ordinary man,
but he is braver five minutes longer."*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

In this issue of *Illuminations*, we are proudly sharing the life and times of some of Los Angeles' earliest heroes – all of whom devoted their time as firefighters.

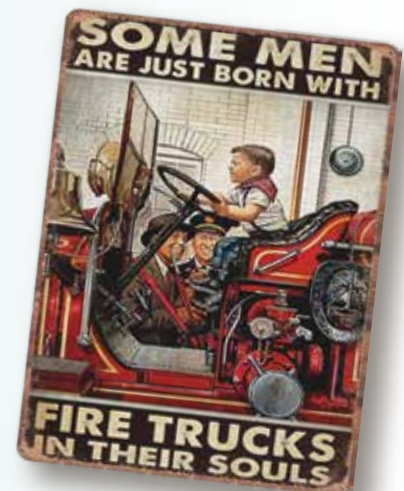
We all admire the bravery and heroism firefighters and understand that the precious minutes and courage that it takes to save the lives and property demands a brave heart and a commitment to serve others.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's fame as an essayist, philosopher, and leader of the Transcendental Movement in the 19th century was launched by a series of lectures he presented at the Boston Masonic Temple in 1835. In that same year, the Mexican Congress promoted Los Angeles from the rank of pueblo to ciudad and made it the territorial capital of Alta California.

We hope you'll enjoy reading about the earliest firefighters who heroically served their fellow citizens. All of the four heroes including Thomas Rowan, Jacob Kuhrts, Thomas Strohm, and Walter Moore whose stories you can read about in this issue were proud members of the Masonic Fraternity. Their lives and accomplishments are part of the fascinating history of Freemasons in the West.

Take an extra five minutes
to share these stories with others,

Sean Foran
Curator and President



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"First & Foremost in Los Angeles History"



**Mayor Thomas Rowan (1842 – 1901).
Helped organize the first volunteer fire
company in 1873.**

Rowan's name is found among the charter members of the famous 38's, the first Volunteer Fire Department, in Los Angeles.

Rowan was Master of Los Angeles Lodge, No. 42, F&AM in 1869 and member of Los Angeles No. 9, Knights Templar.



The Los Angeles City Council had the authority to form a fire department as early as 1850, however no action was taken until 1871 when the Volunteer Fire Department was formed. The members of Engine Company #1 reorganized under the banner of the 38's #1, named for the 38 original members. Shortly after the founding of the Thirty-Eights a second engine company was formed and named Confidence Engine Company #2

After unsuccessfully trying to put a suitable ladder truck into service, the department purchased a 65 foot extension ladder in 1876 which would be known as Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company #1. In 1878, the residents in the area of the 6th Street Park organized the Park Hose Company #1 which was furnished with a four wheel hose carriage drawn by two horses. During the fall of 1883 the last volunteer company was organized in the Morris Vineyard their name would be Morris Vineyard Hose Company #3. During 1882, the employees of the Southern Pacific Railroad formed an engine company not affiliated with the City department; it was known as the Southern Pacific #1.

At the time the paid Department was formed (January 12, 1886) the volunteers consisted of three hundred and eighty members: Engine Company #1 (the Thirty-Eights) situated in the Plaza, Confidence Engine #2 at 2nd and Main Streets, Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company #2 on Aliso Street below Alameda Street and Park House Company #1 at 5th and Spring Streets.



“First & Foremost in Los Angeles History”



Jacob Kuhrts became Chief September 26, 1887. Kuhrts joined the Volunteer Fire Department in 1871 and was later elected president of the Volunteer Fire Department and served as the Foreman of 38's Engine Company #1. Later in life Kuhrts went on to serve for many years as a Fire Commissioner. The Engine Company's Amoskeag steamer was named the "Kuhrtz" steamer because he was responsible for obtaining this first rig for the LAFD.



Kuhrts, Jacob (1832-1926)
Fire Chief, President of Volunteer Fire Department, Foreman of 38's Engine Company, responsible for acquiring first pumping rig for LAFD

Kuhrts was Chief of the Los Angeles Fire Department, President of the Los Angeles Common Council, Commissioner of the Board of Public Works, Fire Commission and Police Commission.

Jacob Kuhrts was a member of Los Angeles Commandery No. 9, Knights Templar and a Charter Member of Al Malaikah Shrine Temple.



JACOB KUHRTS
Fire Commissioner

Joined the Volunteer Fire Department upon its organization in Sept., 1871. Treasurer of the Volunteer Dept. 1874 and President in 1875. From 1876—78 served as Foreman of the 38's Engine Co. No. 1, and from 1878—80 served as President of the same Company. Was Chief of the Volunteer Department from 1880—84 and President from 1884—86. In 1886 was appointed a Fire Commissioner and has served continuously to the present time.

“First & Foremost in Los Angeles History”



Thomas Strohm (1846-1929)
*Fire Chief of Los Angeles on three separate terms,
between 1887 and 1905 and a member of the old
Thirty-Eights.*

Strohm was a skillful and resolute fire fighter. He was also a member of the Los Angeles City Council, Deputy Sheriff and U.S. Marshall.

Master of Los Angeles Lodge No. 42, F&AM
and member of
Los Angeles
Commandery No. 9,
Knights Templar



Strohm was born on November 5, 1846, near Ulm, Germany. His family emigrated to America in 1852, Young Thomas attended public schools in Cincinnati, then learned to be a machinist and a gym instructor. He moved to California, near San Francisco, in 1872, working briefly in the San Francisco Mint. In 1876 he moved to Wilmington, California. He was married to Emily Schubnell and had five children.

Strohm volunteered as a fireman on March 20, 1876, and in 1904 he recalled, “At that time there were two engine companies, a volunteer service, and only the driver and engineer paid. The city rented its buildings, and that was all the fire department there was. Now we have twelve engine companies in service and one in reserve, five hose companies and two chemical companies, making nineteen houses in all. And there are 128 men on the pay roll. We have eighty-five horses instead of the four we had in 1876, for at that time the hose reels were hauled by hand.”

Strohm was injured on the job on December 9, 1901, when he was climbing an 18-foot ladder during a fire. He suffered a fractured foot, and his symptoms included nausea, sleeplessness, and deafness in his left ear. He resumed work after about six weeks, and met with another accident, in which the muscles in his right arm were torn from their fastenings.

During his illness the big Hayden & Lewis fire occurred and the chief's presence was deemed necessary. He was taken out of bed and driven to the scene of the blaze and, though unable to stand, directed the movements of his department from the wagon in which he had been carried to the fire.

Strohm was elected to the Los Angeles City Council from the 7th Ward in December 1892 and served until December 1894.

Strohm worked as a machinist, ran a grocery business then he went into the business manufacturing ice and soda water. The company became the Head Excelsior Water Bottling Company and later the Shasta Water Company.

In 1906 Strohm was serving as a deputy sheriff in Los Angeles Superior Court, and the next year he was a city meat inspector. He was also a deputy United States Marshal. Strohm was employed as a storekeeper on the Los Angeles Aqueduct project in 1909, which was being built to bring water to Los Angeles from the Owens River Valley.

At the time of his death, at 82, on March 22, 1929, he was the oldest Knight Templar in Los Angeles, and he had also been a past master of Masonic Lodge No. 42. His burial service was at Inglewood Park Cemetery.

“First & Foremost in Los Angeles History”



Walter Scott Moore (1853 – 1919)
First Chief of the paid Los Angeles Fire Dept.

Moore was a 40 year member of
Los Angeles Lodge No. 42, F&AM



Walter S. Moore became identified with the volunteer Los Angeles Fire Department in 1875 becoming a member of Confidence Engine Company No. 2. During his service in this company he held the office of secretary and subsequently president.

In 1883 he was elected chief engineer of the Volunteer Fire Department of Los Angeles. At the time the paid department came into existence in 1886, Mr. Moore was secretary of the first Board of Fire Commissioners and chief engineer.

In January 1886, Walter S. Moore was elected the first Chief of the recently established paid Los Angeles Fire Department. Mr. Moore was provided with a buggy and two horses. His home was also equipped with a tapper so that he would be informed of all alarms, day and night.

Moore recommended, “that the men of the department should be furnished with leather fire helmets, to be used to afford them some protector against injuries from falling bricks, blocks of wood, plaster and other dangers.”

Chief Moore was well known and appreciated for his thoroughness and attention to detail. He also had a strong desire to see his department keep pace with the rapid growth of the city.

The abilities of Chief Moore as a proficient fireman and administrator were not confined to the city of LA. In 1898 he was president of the Pacific Coast Association of Fire Chiefs, and also active in the International Association of Fire Engineers.

Walter S. Moore was 35 years of age at the time of his first appointment as chief engineer. At the time of his retirement the chief engineer's salary was \$2400 per year.



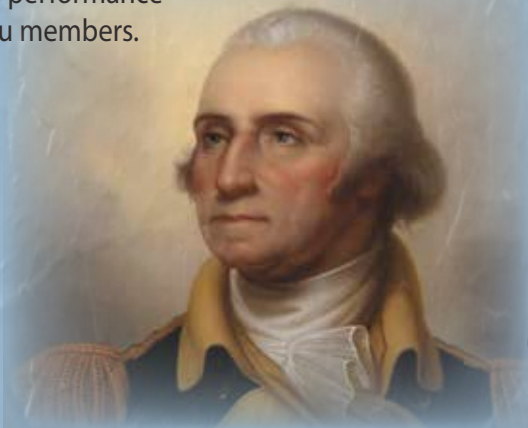


Planning a Table Lodge or Festive Board?

The Grace Dee May Museum will share with your Lodge the history of the early Freemasons who launched the California Wine Industry

Historic Programs for Your Group

"This is your life....Brother George Washington" is a short patriotic drama about our Founding Fathers. The GDM Museum is ready to bring this performance to life for you members.



Contact our Curator Sean Foran
by email: info@gracedeemay.org
or call: 818-222-6796

We'll happily put your event
on our calendar.



Curator Sean Foran leads a group tour through our gallery and shares the history of early Los Angeles



Book a GUIDED VIP TOUR for your group

Museum docents will share the fascinating history of the incredible impact of Freemasons on the City of Los Angeles. Reservations are now being accepted for free VIP Group Tours of the this Grace Dee May Museum exhibit

"THE BUILDERS: *The First Century of Freemasonry in Early Los Angeles*"

Contact GDM Curator, Sean Foran at: info@gracedeemay.org
or leave a message for our Curator at: 818-222-6796

New Discoveries Everyday. Explore history at the Grace Dee May Museum.

Share the history of Masonry

- Spread the word about the Grace Dee May Museum & Library to family and friends
- Forward links to the Grace Dee May Museum *Illuminations*
- Encourage your fraternal contacts to visit GDM exhibits
- Consider becoming a Grace Dee May Museum Docent



Secure the Preservation of Art and History

- Become a member of the Grace Dee May Founder's Circle

Bring History Home

- Order exclusive fraternal merchandise for yourself or as gifts for others



Contribute to Masonic research and education

- Consider a monthly or annual donation
- Make the Grace Dee May Museum part of your legacy giving.

Support History & Art. Support Freemasonry. Support the Grace Dee May Museum.

Our Vision:

The Grace Dee May Museum will seek to present a thematic look at the American West by utilizing its extensive collection of Western Art, and incorporate California history to broaden and deepen the public knowledge and appreciation of the men and women that settled the western part of the United States.

Our Mission:

The Grace Dee May Museum is committed to advancing the public's knowledge and understanding of the American West and the contributions that Freemasonry has played in its development.

Sean Foran, BOARD PRESIDENT AND CURATOR
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