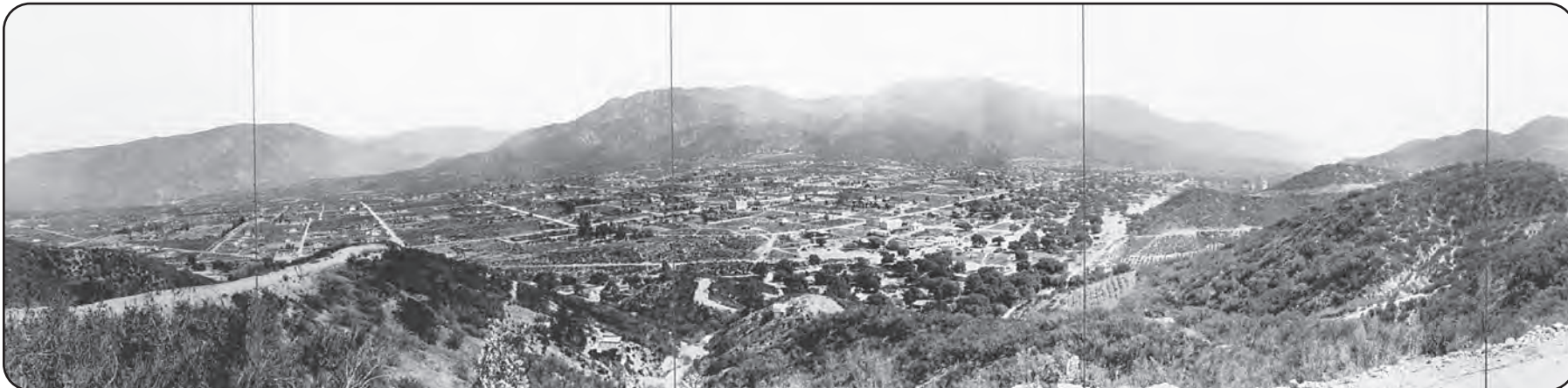


# History Comes Alive!

~ Tales From the City Archives ~



by Hynda Rudd  
City Archivist (Retired) and Club Member



A panoramic view of Tujunga in 1923.



One of the first Tujunga homes.

## Tujunga: A Utopian Concept

and fresh mountain breezes, 'the most healthy place in the world.' It attracted many asthmatics. Tujunga was incorporated in 1925 but decided to join Los

Angeles [as a community] in 1932, to ensure a supply of water."

As stated above, Tujunga was incorporated in 1925. On May 26, 1925, at 8 p.m., there was a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the City of Tujunga held in the Legion Hall. The meeting was called to order by the clerk, who read "a communication from the Secretary of State, advising that Certificate of the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County, covering incorporation of the City of Tujunga, had been duly filed in his office, May 1, 1925... as a City of the Sixth Class."

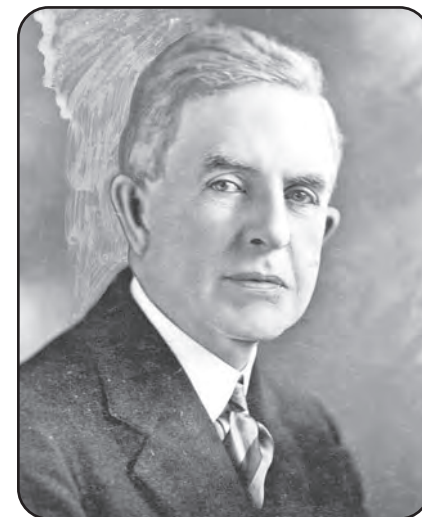
Issues at the meeting dealt with the oath of office for the trustees; election of officers; five ordinances, one of which was to select a common seal for the city; and resolutions were read. The remainder of the evening meeting was business as usual that would continue until early March 1932.

Early Sunland, also an original home to the Tongva people, began its existence in 1885 as Monte Vista. It was also a part of the original Tujunga Park Tract. Lots were divided into areas from five to 40 acres. One of

the largest tracts in the early years was for planting 40 acres of olives; this became the largest olive orchard in Los Angeles County. After much consideration, discussion and elections, on June 2, 1926, West Sunland District became annexed into the city of Tujunga. La Tuna Canyon was annexed into Tujunga in 1927.

From 1926 through 1932, there was consideration to annex the City of Tujunga into the City of Los Angeles. The first election, which was a disaster because of too much rain and not enough voters, occurred Feb. 15, 1927. A second election in 1930 was also defeated by the voters. John Steven McGroarty, described below, was on a committee opposing the annexation. But the third and final election held in January 1932 resulted in a favorable vote to become a community within the city of Los Angeles. By Tujunga giving up its independence, it formally became part of Los Angeles city on March 8, 1932.

A major figure in the history of Tujunga was John Steven McGroarty. He had been a Poet Laureate of California from 1933 until his death in 1944. He was also a playwright and a United States Democratic Congressman from the 11th District. He was also on the editorial staff of the *Los Angeles Times* for 40 years. He was considered a California history booster when he wrote a five-volume collection in 1933



John S. McGroarty.

entitled *California of the South*. He lived in a home in Tujunga that he built himself. It was known as Rancho Chupa Rosa, and is now known as the McGroarty Arts Center.

According to the Internet movie reference site IMDB, Tujunga was one of the locations used for the 1984 movie, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*.

The community of Tujunga, often referred to as Sunland-Tujunga, is one of 11 communities in the City of Los Angeles that originally was its own city. The others were: Barnes (1926-27), Eagle Rock (1911-23), Hollywood (1903-13), Hyde Park (1921-23), Ocean Park/Venice (1906-24), San Pedro (1879-1925), Sawtelle (1901-22), Venice (1900-25), Watts (1912-26), and Wilmington (1852-1913). All these past municipal records are found in the Los Angeles City Archives. I chose Tujunga because it was originally developed because of a utopian concept.

Originally, Sunland and Tujunga were home to the Tongva people. In 1840, this area was part of the Rancho Tujunga Mexican land grant. In years to come, developers designated a plot of this land to become known as Tejungo Park, or the Tujunga Park Tract about 1885. This area is in the northern San Fernando Valley between the Verdugo Hills and San Gabriel Mountains. It is 14 miles from downtown Los Angeles.

This idealized utopian community was founded by a socialist M.V. Hartranft in 1907. The concept was based on the principles of a William Ellsworth Smythe, an irrigationist (a supporter of the farming method of irrigation), social philosopher, and believer of a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions. Even though utopianism was a highly impractical idea, Smythe had been successful in establishing colonies in San Ysidro and in Idaho. The utopianists in the Tujunga area had a slogan, "A Little Land and a Lot of Living." The founders divided their area into 1.5-acre lots, which they referred to as "little lands." In 1913, a community center, Bolton Hall, was built using local river rock. Today, it stands as a historical monument.

As described in an issue of *Coronet* magazine (1936-1971) and repeated by Leonard and Dale Pitt in their volume, *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County*, Tujunga was described as having a "1,500-foot elevation, [with] intense sunlight,



Tujunga government in 1929.



McGroarty Park.