Cowboys and Carols

by Margi Bertram, Museum Administrator

December 2, 2017

**Again this year the Friends of Hart Park will celebrate the Christmas holidays along with the 153rd anniversary of William S. Hart’s birthday. On Saturday, December 2nd, the Museum will be open to the public for this free special evening event. The Hart Mansion will be generously decorated for the holiday, with ornament laden trees, garland wrapped railings, and wreaths on some of the windows. For this evening event only, lights will be dimmed, and electric candles will be liberally spread around the house, providing a truly different experience.**

**There will also be carols sung by the Valencia High Choir, dressed in Victorian holiday attire. And beautiful holiday solo violin performances by Jesse Brazil.**

**Light refreshments will be served, and transportation will be provided from the park area to and from the Mansion. There is no need for reservations or ticket sales, just come on down to the Hart Park and Museum for some Christmas cheer!**

**Looking at what kind of Christmas celebrations might have been popular in the years Hart lived here in Newhall, I found that back in 1920, Altadena resident Frederick Nash decided to light up a ¼ mile strand of trees he had planted along Santa Rosa Avenue. Over the next few years the lighting expanded until the entire row of trees, 150 in all, were lighted. It was quite the spectacle to see from the seats of slowly passing cars. By 1927 it was estimated that nearly 50,000 automobiles traveled what had become known as Christmas Tree Street. Now called Christmas Tree Lane (Santa Rosa Avenue between Woodbury Avenue and Altadena Drive) is the oldest large-scale Christmas lighting spectacle in the United States. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has been designated as the California State Landmark No 990. What do you think, did Bill Hart and his sister venture over to Altadena to take in this holiday tradition?**

**We don’t know a lot about how Hart celebrated the Christmas holiday. However, we do have a letter dated August 23, 1944, nearly a year after his sister’s passing, addressed to the Community Church in Newhall:**

**“Please find enclosed my check for one thousand dollars ($1,000.00) in remembrance of my darling sister, Mary E. Hart, who so enjoyed the carols as rendered by your choir at Christmas time.**

**The following is merely a suggestion and not an arbitrary wish: I should like to know that the money is used for the betterment of the young folks who sing those Christmas carols outside the windows and bring such beauty and peace to those who listen.**

**Sincerely,**

**William S. Hart”**

**So when you join us for the festivities on Saturday, December 2, perhaps you’ll find yourself transported back to a day when this was a traditional holiday event, and perhaps we can all make a toast to Mary Ellen Hart and her love of Christmas carols.**