

The newsletter editors apologize to Dr. Miller and to our readers for inadvertently omitting the ending paragraph from this article when we printed it in our June issue. Because many readers archive our newsletters for later reference, we are reprinting the entire article.

## Helen Hunt Jackson and Temecula

By Anne J. Miller, Ph.D.

Helen Hunt Jackson's writings about the conditions of the Indians in southern California are widely known and her novel *Ramona* has been read by millions since it was published in 1884. Several years before Jackson became interested in the California Mission Indians, she had been involved in Indian rights after the removal of the Ponca Indians from their land in the Dakota Territory. Her book *Century of Dishonor*, which dealt with the government's handling of some U.S. Indian tribes, was published in 1881. In spite of the fact that Jackson is so well known, there are some myths about Jackson's work and her connections to Temecula.

One myth is that Jackson spent a lot of time in Temecula and another is that she actually wrote *Ramona* while staying in Temecula. In addition to Jackson's numerous published writings, she also kept a journal in which she made notes almost daily about where she was and who she saw. She lived in Colorado Springs and traveled extensively. She rarely stayed anywhere for more than a day or two during her travels. She visited almost all the Indian villages in southern California. She also wrote numerous letters to friends and family. Using those unpublished sources, it is relatively easy to determine Jackson's "itinerary" over the years and see that she did not really spend a lot of time in Temecula.

Jackson's diaries (as they are called) are in Special Collections at Colorado College's Tuft Library in Colorado Springs. Jackson arrived in Los Angeles in December 1881. She spent time with Antonio and Mariana Coronel who would become good friends. She spent some time in Santa Barbara and then went by ship to San Diego. From there she visited many southern California Indian villages accompanied by Father Ubach. Her diary mentions that on March 20, 1882 she went to the "end of the track on the Southern California R.R." and that she "slept at Temecula - Wolfes." On the 21<sup>st</sup> she drove to see the Indians "with Mrs. Wolfe." In the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup>, she went on to Riverside. Apparently she only spent one night in Temecula at that time.

Jackson returned to Los Angeles to meet Henry Sandham who would draw the illustrations for her writings as he accompanied her when she returned to this part of southern California. On April 26<sup>th</sup> she went from Potrero to Temecula and then to San Luis [Rey] in the afternoon of the same day. After a day in San Luis Rey she went to San Juan Capistrano. This schedule meant that she would have spent part of a day in Temecula, but perhaps did not stay overnight.

In Jackson's diary for 1883, she noted that she left San Diego for Temecula early on April 30<sup>th</sup> and that she arrived at the Wolf ranch in Temecula at 11:30. In the afternoon, she was at the Pechanga Reservation, which had been established less than a year

earlier in July 1882. The next day she went to Pala. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> Jackson returned from Pala to Temecula. The following day she returned to Los Angeles. It appears that during this visit to the area, Jackson spent two nights in Temecula.

With information acquired from her relatively short visits to California, her previous experiences in Indian reform, and her extensive correspondence and interviews, Jackson was prepared to write another book. She chose to write a novel which she hoped would lead to Indian reform and would be more widely read than her "*Century of Dishonor*." It took Jackson about three months to write *Ramona* during which time she lived in a hotel in New York City. She started writing on December 1, 1883 and finished in March of 1884. A few months later while in her Colorado Springs home, she fell and fractured her leg. In November 1884, she returned to Los Angeles hoping her health would improve, but her condition deteriorated. Later she moved again to San Francisco where she died of cancer in August 1885.

Another myth is that Jackson's *Ramona* is the true story of one family in the Temecula area. As Phillips has noted, Jackson's novel depicts events from a broad range of years, from the 1850s to the 1870s. Like many novelists, Jackson combined many of her personal experiences and things she had heard about to create the people and situations in *Ramona*. As a novelist, she had no requirement to be sure that everything was factually correct. Therefore, one should not assume that all the events in *Ramona* actually happened in Temecula.

#### References:

Jackson, Helen Hunt. *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885*. Edited by Valerie Sherer Mathes. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

Phillips, Kate. *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004.