

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA



June 28, 2006

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HISTORIC HIGHLAND PARK NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

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C/O Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
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The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street, Room 303
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Mr. Mayor:

I am writing on behalf of the Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council and the people of Highland Park to strongly urge you not to give in to the Autry Museum for additional City land on which to expand their current museum facilities unless and until they have agreed in writing not to move the world-renowned Indian artifact collection from the Southwest Museum. To do so would be a grievous injustice to the Arroyo Seco area of Northeast Los Angeles and an unparalleled act of cultural piracy in the history of Los Angeles.

The HHPNC has followed this issue intently over the last three years, ever since the Autry Museum of Western Heritage offered to “rescue” the Southwest Museum from its financial difficulties by merging its operations with the Autry. We have been strong supporters of the area coalition formed to open a dialogue with the Autry. The people of Highland Park are not opposed to the Autry’s merger with the Southwest Museum, but there must be a commitment—so far unrealized—to preserve the historic Southwest Museum AND IT COLLECTIONS as a single entity. The Autry deserves praise for its efforts to preserve the legacy of the founders of the Southwest Museum, but only so far as its efforts do not do damage to that legacy. To move the Southwest’s collections out of the Arroyo Seco was never contemplated and would be an insult to the memory of Charles Fletcher Lummis and the other founders of the museum, and if I may say so, to the enduring memory of Gene Autry as one of the great and fair-minded cowboy role models of television westerns to millions of children who grew up in the late twentieth century.

To emphasize its continuing commitment to the cause of ensuring that the Southwest Museum remains the venue for the display of the greatest Indian artifact collection ever assembled in the United States, the HHPNC took the extraordinary step of considering this matter a second time and passing a second resolution of support for the Southwest Museum on June 15, 2006. We call on you, our Mayor, and the members of the City Council, to insist that the rights and historical tradition of the Arroyo Seco area of Northeast Los Angeles, long a leader in the City’s cultural arena, be upheld in any negotiations with the Autry Museum, and that the Southwest Museum remain the one and only bonafide museum dedicated to displaying the artifacts of our Native Americans. For over a hundred years, the Southwest Museum, along with the Charles Fletcher Lummis home and the Casa Adobe, have been perhaps the three most important cultural and historical focal points of Highland Park and Mount Washington, and they should remain so. To do otherwise is inconceivable.

Mr. Mayor, we need your help and your unequivocal commitment to preserving the Southwest Museum. The people of Northeast Los Angeles, indeed, the entire city, will not be content with a community room, or second-class showroom or other compromise that erases the Southwest Museum from its prominence. Your reputation

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as a leader of our great city will depend at least partly on how this issue eventually plays out, and whether the residents of Los Angeles are proud of, or disillusioned with, the final outcome. The City of Los Angeles has a critical role to play in this issue, and we ask that you weigh your past statements and renew your commitment to preserving this cultural icon. There can and should be a “win-win” result for both the Southwest Museum and the Autry. The Autry does not need to move the Southwest’s collection physically to another venue in order to be recognized for its central role in preserving our Native American heritage.

Sincerely,

Heinrich V. Keifer
President

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C: Honorable Members of the City Council
City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils



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