

Chapter 3: Raiders of the Southwest Museum

A Report from the Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition

Third in a series of flyers to Los Angeles Conservancy Members and Friends

Charles Lummis descends on the Autry Museum in the fictional "Charles Lummis and the Raiders of the Southwest Museum!"

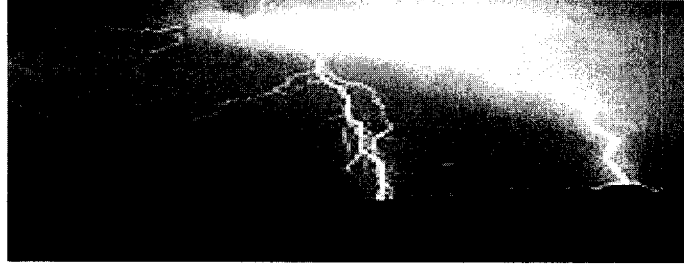


Photo: Northern Rivers Storm Chase by Dave Ellem

The 1914 Southwest Museum founded by Charles Lummis is under attack by the Gene Autry Museum in Griffith Park. Los Angeles Conservancy members can help save Los Angeles's First and Most Historic Museum by speaking out.

And now, the latest Chapter of "Charles Lummis and the Raiders of the Southwest Museum"

Roll Opening Credits and Recap: In the first two episodes of our "film" called **Charles Lummis and the Raiders of the Southwest Museum**, we learned that Jackie Autry, the Widow of Singing Cowboy Gene Autry, and her band of Board Members, have obtained control of the graceful 13-acre Southwest Museum campus and priceless 220,000 piece Southwest Museum Collection through the signing of a Merger Agreement. Mrs. Autry's museum paid ZERO (\$0) dollars to merge with the Southwest Museum. The Merger Agreement she signed said that BOTH the Southwest Museum and Gene Autry Museum would be operated *as separate museum locations* under the umbrella of something called the "Autry National Center." U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation call for an historic property like the Southwest Museum building to be "used as it was historically" as the highest, best and preferred use **before** resorting to adaptive reuse. In the Southwest Museum Merger Agreement, Mrs. Autry and her Board Members promised the People of the State of California (through the Attorney General) that she would assume the "trust obligations" of the former Southwest Museum Board and that means she promised the Southwest Museum would continue to be operated at the expense of the Autry National Center. **THAT PROMISE** was what Autry "paid" to get title to the Southwest Museum and its contents, once estimated by Southwest Museum Director Duane King to be worth close to a Billion (\$1,000,000,000) Dollars. **Shot of Jackie Autry dancing a jig as fade to black.**

Opening Chapter 3: "An Inconvenient Truth From Brenda Levin"

SCENE ONE: Southwest Museum, Historic Architect Brenda Levin (LA City Hall, LA Central Library, Griffith Park Observatory to name a few of her rehabilitation projects in Los Angeles) and her team have assembled in an Exhibition Hall to review the results of months of research: "OK, team, what have we concluded can be done to rehabilitate the Southwest Museum and make it a world-class niche museum?" Kathryn Smith, Historian: "Well, the entire career of Charles Lummis was the prologue to the founding of the Southwest Museum. He selected the magnificent setting of the building to be integrated with the landscape and its elevation provides spectacular views in all directions. Additionally, the museum would be visible for great distances in the Arroyo Seco creating an immediately recognizable icon for the area." Yes, there is no question that the Museum establishes the cultural identity of Northeast LA.

The Levin Team Inspects the Building from Outside: "The Southwest Museum's period of significance for historic rehabilitation is from 1912 to 1941 when Charles Lummis conceived of the museum, Architects Sumner P. Hunt and Silas R. Burns designed and built the original Museum, and the addition of the Caroline Boeing

(over for more of *Charles Lummis and Raiders of the Southwest Museum*)

Poole Wing designed by architect Gordon B. Kaufmann and added in 1941. The 1979 Braun Library addition, which is not significant, as well as other features, can be modified *to create a dynamic new museum experience within the historic envelope of the Southwest Museum building.*

The Levin Team Looks into the Mechanical, Electrical, and Safety System Closets: No surprises here. Given that the museum is almost 100 years old these systems need to be replaced consistent with modern standards. We see this all the time with other beautiful old buildings that require renovation. *Brenda Levin:* “This was done at City Hall and the Los Angeles Central Library to restore them and our City continues to use them ‘as they were historically used.’” What’s the total capital cost? The rehabilitation and modest expansion would cost \$22.8 million. It would be the job of the Autry Board of Directors, fulfilling their “trust obligations” in the Merger to raise a combination of public and private funds to carry out the capital construction program.

The Levin Team Finds The Southwest Museum Is Now and Can Continue to Operate Within the Norms of Museum Industry: *Brenda Levin:* “Now let’s turn to our Museum Operations experts. A few years ago, you did a study on economic development at the Southwest Museum rail station that projected a renewed Southwest Museum would attract attendance exceeding 125,000 visitors a year.” *John Robinett, of the Economic Resources Associates, looking across the table at John Gray, CEO of the Autry:* “Um. Well, we now think that perhaps our earlier study was, um, too optimistic. We now project that a rehabilitated museum will likely attract only 64,000 visitors per year.” *Brenda Levin:* “A 50% drop from your previous study!! How will the Southwest Museum perform?” *Robinett:* “Well, it would still recover about 38 percent of operating costs which is fairly typical for a museum. Most museums recover between 30 and 50 percent, depending on certain factors.” *Brenda Levin:* “So there will be a gap between revenues and operating expenses?” *Robinett:* “Yeah. But the Board of every museum in the country has such a deficit to cover. To carry out educational purposes, museums never ‘make’ money and the Board makes up the difference by raising endowment and annual fundraising.” **Go to www.friendsofthesouthwestmuseum.com to download and see Levin’s report!**

Autry Museum Executive Office, Late Night: *John Gray, CEO, reviews the Levin Report:* Shaking his head as he reads the Levin Report, Gray groans at the conclusions. We’ll just stick this “Letter to the Community” on the front of Brenda’s report. That will fix it! It says: “Based upon the projected operating losses [of the Southwest Museum] we do not believe it is economically feasible to operate the site exclusively as a museum.”

SCENE TWO: Meeting of the Southwest Museum Coalition: *Chair:* “When we got the Levin Report from Autry, we hired a nationally known expert in cultural-historic museums to review the economic study contained in the Levin report. He actually used to work for Autry’s economic consultant! Thomas?” *Thomas Martin, of ConsultEcon:* “I have reviewed the Levin economic reports and visited both museums. This letter on the front of the Levin Report? There is a complete disconnect between the conclusions of the report and the claim in John Gray’s letter that the Southwest Museum is “not economically feasible.” The Levin Report directly states the museum could operate within normal museum standards. Gray’s letter asserts that because the Southwest Museum would recover 38% of its costs, it’s economically infeasible. But, look at the Autry Museum in Griffith Park. My review shows it’s been recovering only 25% of its own operating costs!” **Gasp by all in the room.** *Chair:* “So are you saying that Autry’s claim that the Southwest Museum is “not feasible” is false. . . and that Autry hypocritically will make up its own 75% operating losses but refuse, contrary to the PROMISE it made in the Merger Agreement, to make up the Southwest’s much smaller operating loss?” *Thomas Martin:* “My review of the Levin report shows the numbers were dramatically suppressed to try to make the Southwest Museum look bad. In my expert opinion, when the Levin Report numbers are adjusted for more realistic attendance and costs, the restored Southwest Museum can recover 67% of its costs! It could be a super performing museum!” **Read Thomas Martin’s full report: www.friendsofthesouthwestmuseum.com**

SCENE THREE: Night. Dark Clouds and Lightning Gather Over the Autry Museum: The ghost of Charles Lummis descends. He booms to Jackie Autry and John Gray: “You promised to maintain our history and museum with your huge endowment and marketing talent. I think you entered the Merger Agreement with no intent to carry it out!! It was a ruse to get your hands on the \$1 billion dollar Southwest Collection! **FLASH!** *Next week, CHAPTER 4: John Gray Claims That The Preservation Community Supports Autry Expansion!*

**YOU CAN WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER OF
“CHARLES LUMMIS AND RAIDERS OF THE SOUTHWEST MUSEUM”**

The Mayor of Los Angeles, under the guidance of the Human Relations Commission, is now conducting a **public input process** to find out what people think about Autry’s proposal to use City parkland to expand its building in Griffith Park in order to ENABLE the movement of the Southwest Museum’s Collection, Exhibits, and Name into the Autry’s museum building. **All comments must be submitted by July 5, 2006.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- 1. TELL THE MAYOR WHAT YOU THINK** - Write to the Mayor and other Elected Officials to express your support of the Southwest Museum’s rehabilitation and creation of a vibrant and modern museum displaying the Southwest’s vast collection. Over 7,000 people have signed the Coalition’s petitions demanding that Autry sign a new agreement with the California Attorney General confirming its Merger Agreement responsibility to raise funds for and continue to operate the Southwest Museum in the Arroyo Seco AS A CONDITION of any City of Los Angeles permission to use more City parkland to expand the building in Griffith Park. The Mayor appoints the Recreation and Park Commission that will make this decision. Send your e-mail or letter to ALL of the following:

Mayor Villaraigosa:

mayor@lacity.org or 200 N Spring St., Room 303 LA, CA 90012

Councilmember Jose Huizar (Southwest Museum in his district):

councilmember.huizar@lacity.org or 200 N. Spring St., Room 425 LA, CA 90012

Councilmember Ed Reyes (Casa de Adobe portion of SW Museum in his district):

councilmember.reyes@lacity.org or 200 N. Spring St., Room 410, LA, CA 90012

Councilmember Tom LaBonge (Autry Museum in his district):

tom.labonge@lacity.org or 200 N. Spring St., Room 480, LA, CA 90012

Human Relations Commission, Gary de la Rosa (compiling comments for Mayor):

gary.delarosa@lacity.org or 200 N. Spring St., Room 1625 LA 90012

Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition (make sure we get a copy!!):

swmcoalition@pacbell.net or 755 Crane Blvd., LA 90065

- 2. SIGN THE COALITION’S ONLINE PETITION** – Join other who have signed:
<http://www.petitiononline.com/SWM/petition.html> and sign electronically!

- 3. EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT THIS CONTROVERSY:**

Charles Lummis – www.charleslummis.com

Autry National Center – Enter: www.southwestmuseum.org and see where it takes you.

Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition – www.friendsofthesouthwestmuseum.com

Contact us to offer your help, comments, and suggestions: swmcoalition@pacbell.net

- 4. ATTEND A CITY-SPONSORED SOUTHWEST MUSEUM FORUM:**

June 22, 2006 – *Plaza de la Raza*, 3540 N. Mission Rd.,
in Lincoln Heights at 6:30 p.m.

June 24, 2006 – *Exposition Park Intergenerational Center*, 3980 S. Menlo Ave.,
in Exposition Park on a Saturday at 10:00 a.m.

June 29, 2006 – *Ramona Hall*, 4580 N. Figueroa Street,
in Highland Park/Mount Washington at 6:30 p.m.

**Charles Lummis would not have remained silent. We need to speak for
him, his legacy, and the treasure of the Southwest Museum!**