



# ODYSSEY

CITY OF SAN BERNARDINO  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 875  
SAN BERNARDINO, CA. 92402

### Editor

FRED HOLLADAY

### Business Manager

CHRISTIAN R. HARRIS  
Phone: 883-7759

### Associate Editors

ARDA M. HAENSZEL  
RICHARD D. THOMPSON

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## EDITOR'S COLUMN

SEVERAL generations ago, when firecrackers were legal in San Bernardino, the 4th of July topped even Christmas in the minds of many youngsters, who hoarded pennies all year to stockpile various explosive devices, most of which were purchased in our local Chinatown, located on 3rd street, between Arrowhead and Mt. View Avenues.

The carnage started slowly -- perhaps a week before Independence Day -- when more affluent moppets started lighting punks and igniting sundry items from their horde. Others, denied an early start, because of limited funds, watched jealously as the rich kids temporarily established dominance.

But by the 4th, all were equal again, when the entire town erupted into block-by-block recreations of the greatest battles of WW I. No man nor beast was safe on that glorious day as streets filled with screaming urchins all lighting crackers and either throwing them at each other or trying for new altitude heights by blowing tin cans sky-high; blocked out the sun with clouds of sulfurous gunpowder fumes.

While the "wee-ones" shot off "lady fingers," firecrackers so small one could hold them while they went off, more daring brothers (and sisters) exploded "1-inchers," (thick, green-colored crackers) or "Cherry Bombs," about the size of red-colored ping-pong balls, which literally ruptured one's ear drums if set off too close.

Dogs and Cats disappeared during the affair, often hiding for days before they felt safe enough to return to the scene of action.

As old timers know, most of those early firecrackers were made in China, by tightly wrapping sheets of newspapers around grains of gunpowder and wick. When the crackers disintegrated, bits of paper, covered with Chinese characters, flew everywhere and for months afterwards one could find remnants of Chinese writing all over town. In fact, a few such examples might still exist today, in and around the frame of an old abandoned house or under an undisturbed rock in a vacant lot.

I will never forget the time a brother-in-law exploded a 12-inch square cracker in

(Continued on Page 35)