



## BOWERS MUSEUM

*...your window to the world's richest cultures*

The Bowers Museum, one of Southern California's finest museums, is also Orange County's largest cultural institutions. Its mission is to enrich lives by promoting understanding through the visual arts.

Bowers Museum is situated on the site of the former home of Charles and Ada Bowers, who bequeathed the land and funds for the construction of the original museum in the early 1930s. Over last seventy-five years, through the generosity of donors, and in partnership with the City of Santa Ana, the museum has expanded three times. Today's facility contains permanent galleries devoted to the history of Southern California, with an emphasis on Orange County, Pre-Columbian civilizations, arts of ancient China and California paintings.

The museum's permanent collection consists of more than 130,000 objects, donated from 1935 to the present. They represent many regions and cultures of the world. The largest collections are in the areas of Native American art, Pre-Columbian art, Asian art, art of the Pacific, art of Africa and Orange County history. A notable California painting collection includes such artists as William and Alberta McCloskey, Frank Coburn, William Wendt, Gardner Simons and Guy Rose. In the future, the Bowers will offer an online catalogue of its collection to be linked to its website, [Bowers.org](http://Bowers.org).

In addition to its collections, the expansive state-of-the-art facility enables the Bowers to present world-class exhibitions from the greatest museums in the world. In just the last few years, the Bowers has played host to *Terra Cotta Warriors*, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Treasures of Ur*, *Treasures from Tibet*, and *Secrets of the Silk Road*.

The Bowers, accredited by the American Association of Museums, has pursued active educational programming: publishing books, monographs and exhibit catalogs, as well as producing teacher and student resource guides that correspond to the California's educational curriculum. Highly-trained docents provide interactive guided tours throughout the exhibition areas, as well as offer outreach programs for school children and seniors. A Speaker's Bureau is available to civic groups.

The Bowers Kidseum has a full array of children's weekday and weekend activities, including an archaeology-focused summer camp. Scholarly lectures are scheduled each weekend in the museum's state-of-the-art auditorium. Unique travel experiences, art and craft classes, as well as opportunities to join affiliate groups are available to museum members. These groups include The Collectors Council, The Bead Society, African and Italian Art Councils and The Bowers California Art Council.

## The History of the Bowers Museum

Most visitors to the Bowers Museum enter through an historic Spanish courtyard. While walking under the bell tower, they often wonder if the facility was once a mission, or perhaps a private residence. It was neither. The building was constructed in 1932 as a historic museum, the result of a trust left to the City of Santa Ana by Charles and Ada Bowers.

Charles Wesley Bowers was born in Ohio on December 26, 1842, to Jonathan and Mary Morris Bowers. He was the only one of three to survive childhood illnesses. In 1862, he moved, with his parents, to Illinois where they farmed for two years, then pushed westward to Missouri where Jonathan purchased timberland that he and Charles cleared and farmed for the next twenty years.

When Jonathan Bowers' health began to fail, he and his wife sought a more temperate climate in the south, leaving the farm responsibilities to Charles. Then in 1886, the couple visited California where they found the climate quite agreeable. Jonathan wrote Charles, directing him to sell the family interests and join them in Santa Ana. After his arrival, Charles and his father engaged in land development and citrus cultivation.

Initially, the Bowers resided in the vicinity of First and Cypress Streets in Santa Ana. In 1890, Jonathan purchased a four-acre parcel of land at Twentieth and Main for \$6,000 where he built a large Victorian home along with several outbuildings and a water tower. Jonathan Bowers passed away that year. His wife died in 1902, leaving Charles heir to the family home and property. Six months after the death of his mother, Charles, aged fifty-nine, married Eliza Pedelty of Santa Ana, who lived only another three years.



*Ada and Charles Bowers*

In 1908, Charles married Ada Elvira Abbott, a native of Illinois. They lived quietly and simply, never having children. Business associates recalled that Charles was financially very conservative, making only modest and infrequent investments.

In 1910, the Bowers took a lengthy trip throughout the United States and Canada. They accumulated a large postcard collection of historic monuments and landmarks. Although both were interested in American history, Charles was particularly drawn to Orange County history. He often discussed its past with his banker, expressing a desire to preserve the heritage of the area by establishing a museum.

It's little wonder that Charles Bowers was inspired by Orange County history. So many names of towns, streets, and canyons were related to events and personalities of the past. The property he inherited had once belonged to the original Yorba-Peralta Land Grant of 1810, the only land grant dispensed in Orange County during the Spanish Period (1697-1821). Yorba and his nephew, Pablo Peralta, had been deeded land for their faithful military service to the Crown. They had developed their holdings into rancheros that became central to the economy of early Orange County. Stories of Yorba, Peralta, and the nearby Sepulveda ranchos, along with tales of Madame Modjeska, the famous Polish actress, continued to be told well into Charles Bowers' time.



*Ada and Charles Bower in front of their home, now the site of the Bowers Museum.*

Charles and Ada Bowers created a trust, in 1924, that would ensure the development of a museum to commemorate and preserve the history of Orange County. This trust, transacted through the first National Bank of Santa Ana, provided that upon the death of the survivor, that the Bowers' home on Twentieth and Main would be conveyed to the City of Santa Ana for the purpose of erecting a fireproof museum building.

If the City of Santa Ana did not accept the provisions of such a facility, the home would be sold with the estate offered to the City of Orange. If that city did not accept, the offer would be made to the first city in Orange County with 5,000 or more residents. If no city accepted, the trust was to be converted to cash and divided evenly among the few existing public schools in Orange County.

Charles W. Bowers died on November 29, 1929. Fifteen months later, on February 28, 1931, his wife Ada passed away at their family home. The Santa Ana City Council took just nine days to act, unanimously adopting the ordinance to accept the trust property, and create the first board of museum trustees. In July 1931, Frank Lansdown of Santa Ana and W. Horace Austin of Long Beach were selected as architects of the new Bowers Museum. They drafted an architectural plan that was reminiscent of a Spanish style adobe structure. William Rohrbacher, an Orange County contractor, was awarded the construction contract at the price of \$54,080. The country was in the throes of the Great Depression. Convinced the construction of the museum would stimulate the local economy, Rohrbacher assured the city council that he would hire local workmen.

In February 1932, the Bowers' big white Victorian home was torn down and the construction of the museum began. The beautiful and solidly built structure was completed in just seven months, at a final cost of \$78,000. The Bowers Museum, however, would not open to the public for four more years. The Depression had sunk to its darkest period and the city council hesitated to increase the budget to cover the operating and maintenance costs of this new facility. In addition, display cases had to be built, furniture provided and exhibit materials collected.

During this four-year hiatus, the WPA (Work Projects Administration) artists completed the interior work, which had not been included in the original building contract. The ceiling murals in the second floor auditorium, now the Gloria and Si Fluor and Family Gallery / The Golden State Gallery, and the First Californians Gallery were designed and painted by European-born artist, Martin Syversen. Featured on the upstairs ceiling are the Mission San Juan Capistrano (center), with surrounding panels that portray Native Americans with Spanish soldiers, Franciscan padres, and the California grizzly bear. Covered wagons and placer miners appear in the other panels. The frescoed ceiling in the Native American Gallery is embellished with ornamental stenciled designs.

The museum finally opened its wrought iron gates in 1936. As it became part of Orange County's cultural life, its collections grew. More space was needed. The Museum expanded in 1974, funded largely by private sources. At this time, the Museum shifted its focus from being an eclectic collector of local historical memorabilia and archaeological artifacts to an institution that now includes the cultural arts of the world and natural history.

By 1986, the Bowers found it necessary to expand again. The frequency and scope of its exhibits, educational programs, community outreach and social functions had outgrown the existing physical plant. The City of Santa Ana formed a Blue Ribbon Planning Committee for the purpose of determining the future of the museum. It was decided that the museum would reopen, totally transformed and ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The board approved the expansion and named Newport Beach architect George Bissell to design the 52,000 square foot addition.

The renovation began in October 1988. The \$12 million project was funded through a Community Redevelopment grant with the goal of fostering a "Museum District" to establish Santa Ana as the County's center of arts and culture. At the same time, a plan was developed to provide for the Bowers to gradually "privatize," thus gradually decreasing the City's financial support.

On October 18, 1992, the museum reopened, on time and under budget, to a crowd of over 17,000 people. Museum space, now 114,500 square feet was six times larger than the original facility. During the first year, the Bowers hosted 11 changing exhibitions that included one of the largest collections of Pre-Columbian gold ever to be seen in the U.S., a beautiful collection of Amazonian art, and, The Tishman Collection of African Art, on loan from the Disney Corporation. Since 1992, the Bowers has presented over 60 world-class exhibitions, opened six permanent galleries and watched its membership grow to over 6,000 members.<sup>1</sup>

On February 18, 2007, the Bowers Museum celebrated its 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary with a third and most significant expansion, the 30,000 square-foot, \$15 million Dorothy and Donald Kennedy Wing, designed by Robert R. Coffee & Associates.

This new wing was underwritten entirely by 217 donors as a state-of-the-art facility that more than doubles the exhibit space. This includes two large exhibition galleries, a central atrium area that can seat 500 people for a special event, a tall linear gallery/foyer, a 300-seat high-tech auditorium, coral tree and olive tree courtyards, and a catering kitchen.

The Bowers, now completing its 75<sup>th</sup> year, is proud to be honored by the Orange County community, and recognized by world-renowned museums, as well as industry professionals as a cultural center that exemplifies excellence in its field.

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<sup>1</sup>"Bowers Museum Fact Sheet" viewed August 3, 2009,  
[http://www.bowers.org/Admin/upload/press\\_items\\_file\\_1249107397.pdf](http://www.bowers.org/Admin/upload/press_items_file_1249107397.pdf)  
9/5/2010 – Revision - MJS



*The new entrance to the Museum on Main Street, Santa Ana.*



The Bowers Museum makes a strong statement about its role in children's education. It opened its 11,000 sq. ft. children's facility in December 1993.

Kidseum is an interactive place that provides arts and cultural activities for thousands of children and their families each year. Thematic areas are filled with treasures that can be touched and played with, including musical instruments, costumes, toys and games, masks, a language map and a rubbing table. Projects are designed to familiarize students with a variety of artistic techniques, materials and objects related to the cultures presented and highlighted at Kidseum. Storytelling adds additional enrichment and excitement. An after school program offers local children a place to do their homework, then engage in artistic expression through music, dance, drama and art.