

REMEMBERING IRMA



If you felt, as I did, a “disruption in the force” the last week of August, it was because Irma Dotson died peacefully in her home here in Danville. How like her to slip away from us so quietly and with such grace.

Irma was a founding board member of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, its first curator, an educator, librarian, historian, author, wife and mother. While this explains “what” she was it in no way explains “who” she was.

Irma was a person of exquisite contrasts; a tiny individual of enormous stature; a quiet, self-effacing personality that could not fully mask a towering intellect, devilish wit and a contagious, twinkle in the eye laugh. She was nothing less than lavish in her generosity of spirit, knowledge, and financial resources. She was gracious, inclusive and blessedly downright stubborn when she needed to be. I adored her.

The old Southern Pacific Depot is now the home of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and it has rightfully become a new “jewel” in the heart of downtown Danville. Without exaggeration, this would not have happened without Irma Dotson. For five years she masterfully led a small group of folks that up to that point, had no experience in such an effort – in restoring and rehabilitating the building. She educated herself and then others in proper restoration techniques and procedures.

Thanks to Irma's active membership in the Danville Historical Resource Commission, you have Irma to thank when you walk down Hartz, Front, or Railroad and marvel at the charming blend of old and new architecture.

I am confident that I speak for many of you when I say that Irma was our touchstone, our mentor, and our dear friend. She is missed but she will be remembered.

*Shouldn't an old friend come through?
It's us, old friend-
What's to discuss, old friend?
Here's to us,
Who's like us-?
Darn few.*

Goodbye, Irma. Godspeed.

Gary DeAtley

In memory of the Dotsons, the Museum Steering Committee has unanimously voted to name the Museum's library The Irma and Jim Dotson Research Library and establish a library fund.

Donations in Irma's honor may be made to The Research Library Fund.

Irma Mc Ginnis Dotson, the Museum's founder, first librarian and curator, was born in West Virginia, one of 12 children from a coal mining family. An excellent student and WAC in World War II, she attended college at West Virginia University. She married Jim Dotson after a whirlwind courtship in 1947. They had 2 sons.

She was always interested in history. She moved to Danville in 1968. Within two years she began to help the new San Ramon Valley Historical Society preserve photographs when they began in 1970. She chaired the committee which decided that an independent Museum Board should be set up in 1985.

As a librarian at both San Ramon Valley and Monte Vista high schools, she brought cracker-jack organization and determination to each task she tackled. Her three books are well-researched and documented. These include *The San Ramon Branch of the Southern Pacific* and *the Danville Branch of the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway* – both available for purchase at the Museum store. She and Jim produced a number of family genealogies and a book tracing the evolution of Danville's downtown, called *Downtown Danville Changes 1976-2001*.

She and Jim also set up the computer archival software we use today and built the computer archives in the first years of the depot, allowing researchers to locate any of over 4500 photographs, paper archives and Museum objects donated to the Museum. What a dedicated, remarkable couple they were!

We will miss her so much and offer our condolences to Rodney Dotson and his family. Irma and Jim are gone, but not forgotten.

The Branch Line

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley in the Depot

❁ Winter 2007

