

Santa Barbara Historical Museum

SHANGHAI GIRL LECTURE

By **RICHARD** and **AMANDA PAYATT**
Special to CASA

IF YOU HAVE EVER WONDERED WHAT SHANGHAI WAS LIKE IN THE 1930s, you missed your big chance to get a glimpse of that wonderful, vibrant, high hat clash of Eastern and Western cultures. Beverley Jackson's morning lecture at the Santa Barbara Historical Museum on April 11th sold out its 150 tickets, so a second session was added after lunch, a tribute to a most interesting and amusing speaker. With fascinating stories illustrated with slides of old photos, old postcards, old advertisements, and new photographs of Shanghai, she painted a deft portrait of a vanished time and place.

A delightful luncheon followed the lecture in the gorgeous setting of the Museum's lovely courtyard. Catering was provided by Seasons Catering. Delicious salmon was perfectly matched with the absolutely fabulous 2005 "De La Guerra Chardonnay," from the Hyde & de Villaine vineyards of Carneros.

Wandering through Shanghai today, one would

see an exciting mixture of old and new China. To see the new China, one only needs to look up. Skyscrapers are everywhere. But to see the old China, one has to look down. Hidden between the tall towers are the old Manchu and Han alleyways. Beside them are the English and French influenced hotels, shops, movie theaters, and apartment houses that remain to this day. And, the centerpiece of Shanghai, the Bund, is as sophisticated as any European city's port of call.

Many of the buildings that one sees today were built in the 1920s, and represent one of the three best places in the world to see untouched Art Deco masterworks. And as the Han and Manchu gowns of the woman of 1900 morphed into the

cheongsam, the Shanghai woman set a fashion trend that remains today. The cheongsam began as clothing for the mistresses of wealthy Chinese, but it soon spread across Shanghai, and around the world. Jackson notes that this shift from formal robe to cheongsam was the first Chinese woman's fashion change in over a thousand years.

The city was populated

with rogues, prostitutes, taxi dancers, flamboyant foreign investors, titled nobility, and thousands upon thousands of sailors on thirsty shore leave. An incautious sailor, of course, ran the risk of getting shanghai'd if he drank a bit too much in the wrong place. It was also a place of fabulous movie palaces. In the 1930s, when a movie opened in New York City, it opened in Shanghai the same day. There were more movie magazines in Shanghai than there were in the whole of the United States. Shanghai's inhabitants tracked the careers, love lives, and fashions of Hollywood with a passion found nowhere else in the world.

In 1937, the Japanese invasion of China entered Shanghai. The party was over. Europeans fled in military transport ships, bearing no more than one or two suitcases per person. After the Chinese Cultural Revolution, more of Shanghai's cultural and architectural treasures disappeared. With the opening up of the new China, Shanghai has been revitalized, and in Jackson's opinion, is one of the most exciting cities in the world today.

Beverley Jackson, a great expert in Chinese Culture and Dress, is the Historical Museum's honorary curator of Chinese Textiles. A former *News Press* columnist, she has written several books. The most recent of which, *The Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up*, follows the outline of her lecture. So, if you missed the lecture, you can still come by the



Director **David Bisol**, **Janet Sands**, **Beverley Jackson**, and **Ed Sands**.

Photos by **Richard Payatt**



Hope Kelly, **Beverley Jackson**, and **Marilyn De Young**

Museum and pick up the book.

While there, be sure to enjoy the current "Gift of History" exhibit which showcases some recent gifts to the Museum's already wonderful collections, including one of the cheongsams that Beverley Jackson

has kindly donated to the museum.

The Santa Barbara Historical Museum periodically gives lectures and luncheons on topics that touch the museum's holdings. For information about future lectures call 966-1601 or visit www.santabarbaramuseum.com.

The Santa Barbara Historical Museum is located at 136 East De La Guerra Street and open Tues-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun 12-5pm.



Jennifer Martin (in a new cheongsam) with **Michael Redmon**, Director of Research and Publication



Traditional informal woman's robes, circa 1900, a recent gift to the museum from **Beverley Jackson**