

## Museum piece declares, 'IT'S WAR!'

By: Charles F. Bostwick  
Antelope Valley Press

Monday, January 16, 2012

*Lancaster City Council Member Sandra Johnson and Vice Mayor Ron Smith hold a Dec. 8, 1941 newspaper printing press plate with the headline, "It's War!" Mark Stone, who works in collections, found the piece on Wednesday evening in the Lancaster Museum Art Gallery storage facilities.*

*Ron Smith reversed photo of a printing press plate from Dec. 8, 1942, shows the headline. In reality more than 2,400 were killed.*

LANCASTER - A 70-year-old reminder of one of America's darkest times came to light as city museum staffers catalogued artifacts in storage in preparation for a move into a new Lancaster Boulevard building.

It's a newspaper press printing plate, its main headline reading, backwards, "IT'S WAR! Hostilities Declared by Japanese; 350 Reported Killed in Hawaii Raid" - the front page of an "extra" edition, apparently printed in the early morning hours of the day after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.

"I thought, 'Oh, my God,'" Vice Mayor Ron Smith said of seeing the plate and its headline.

Found last week, the plate is expected to be in a place of honor when the new Museum of Art and History opens in its

three-story building, presumably this summer. Other interesting objects found in storage in the museum's collection, such as a number of well-done paintings, also are likely to be on display, curator Andi Campognone said.

Who donated the printing plate and how it got into a back room at the museum building on Beech Avenue was not known, because staffers could not find any records for it.

"We're going to have to do a little bit of research," Campognone said.

But the plate is assumed to be authentic, and not some sort of reproduction. The plate is very heavy, with fittings on the rear where it was apparently attached to the printing press, Smith said.

---

## Page 2

"It's one big piece of molded lead," Smith said.

Technically called a "stereotype plate," the plate bears the lead type with which the newspaper page was printed. The plate is a half cylinder, curved to fit to a rotary printing press, with another curved plate intended to form the back half and print a second page.

The plate could have arrived more than a quarter-century ago when the city created the museum, which prompted donations by local residents of objects they had acquired over the years.

Dedicated in January 1986 as the Lancaster Museum-Art Gallery in a former supermarket building, the museum was renamed last year as the Museum of Art and History. It is closed to visitors now as staffers prepare to move into larger quarters on Lancaster Boulevard near Elm Avenue, next to the Artist Lofts, a building with apartments for working artists.

The new museum building, remodeled and enlarged from a bank, contains 20,000 square feet of floor space, or more than twice the space of the old building. Its rooftop terrace has a glass-walled multipurpose room to accommodate lectures for large groups.

Interior work still needs to be done, Campognone said. No date has been set for the opening, she said.

Meanwhile, staffers are cataloging all the items in storage in the Beech Avenue building before moving them to the new building, she said.

One idea for the printing plate, because of its historic significance, is to make prints off it, Smith said.

A copy of the front page created by the plate is in the collection of English author and historic photo collector Peter Newark.

Printed by the Los Angeles Times and dated Dec. 8, the page was apparently published very early on the day after the attack, because most of the articles were dated Dec. 7 and the extent of the disaster was not yet clear.

The main headline referred to 350 dead, but that was only at the Army Air Corps' Hickam Field, from where an NBC radio reporter sent a report. The newspaper also said three U.S. ships were attacked, and the battleship Oklahoma set afire.

In reality, more than 2,400 were killed, four battleships sunk and another four damaged, along with eight other ships.

Nearly the entire page consisted of news bulletins from New York, Honolulu, Tokyo, Washington and Shanghai. Some

of them were wrong, such as a one-sentence bulletin from Honolulu reporting: "Parachute troops were sighted off Pearl Harbor today."

There was also a notice to civilian volunteers in the Aircraft Warning Service, established six months earlier, to staff all West Coast observation posts and watch for enemy aircraft.

The longest story, written in Washington, began: "Japan declared war upon the United States today. An electrified nation immediately united for a terrific struggle ahead. President Roosevelt was expected to ask Congress for a declaration of war tomorrow."

[cbostwick@avpress.com](mailto:cbostwick@avpress.com)