SPRING 2020

lookout avenue

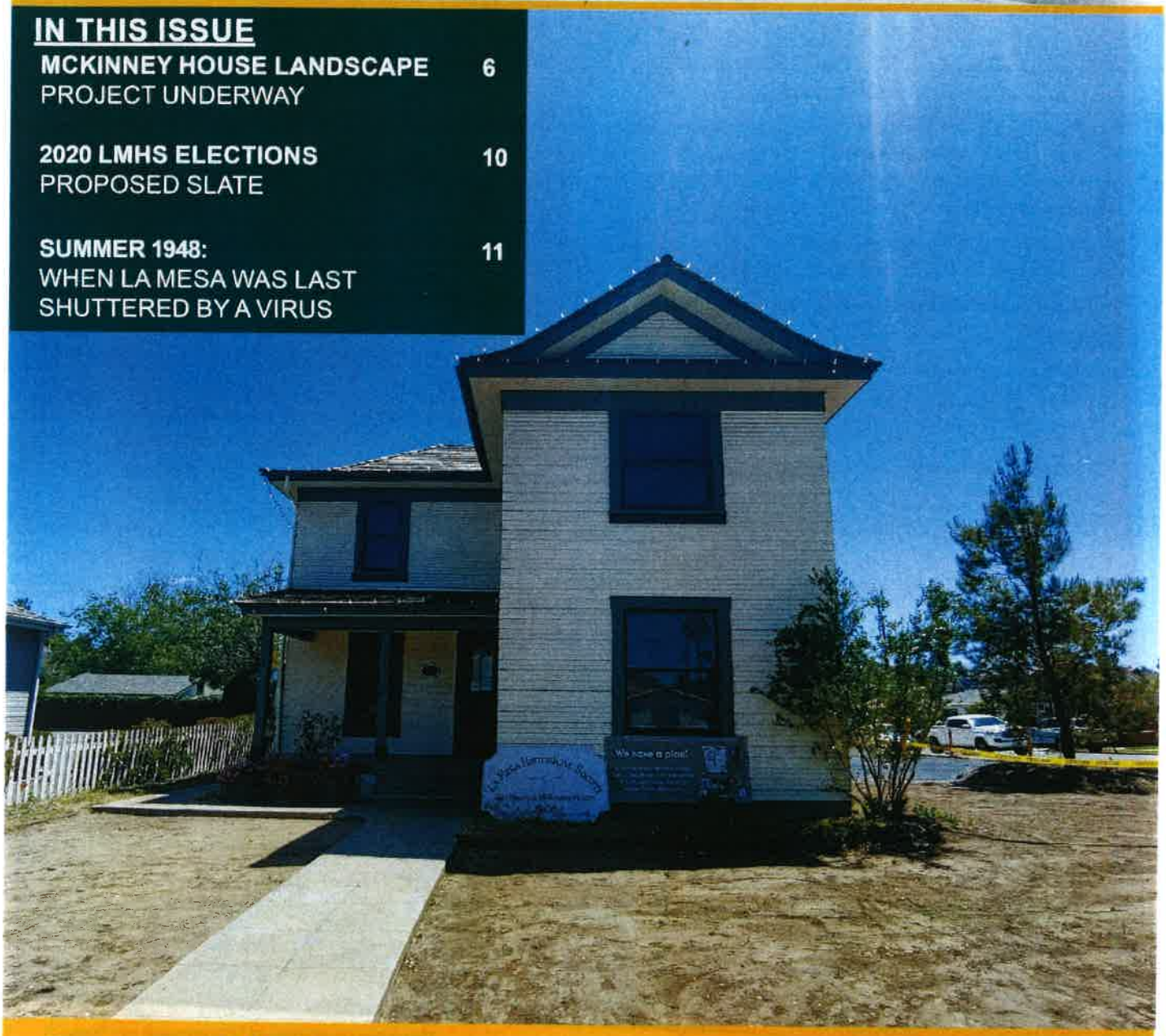


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SHUTTERED BY A VIRUS



The NEWSLETTER of the LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MCKINNEY HOUSE
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ORAL HISTORY
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NEWSLETTER
VANESSA RODRIGUEZ
ALEXANDER QUINTERO

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

A MOST CHALLENGING TIME IN OUR HISTORY

Firstly, I sincerely hope that you and your families, friends and neighbors are well and continue to be so.

The last time I wrote to the membership we were in the process of undertaking some major Historical Society activities and programs. Riding the success of another amazing home tour, undertaking the initial construction efforts in the McKinney House Landscape Rehabilitation and engaging an energetic group of SDSU interns in the Archives and with the City Historical Resource Survey foresaw a very busy and productive start to 2020.

Of course, that path all changed in early March as the full threat of the COVID-19 pandemic was being realized here in California. After restricting volunteers and interns from meeting on Saturday March 7th, I recommended to the Board that we close our McKinney House Museum and Research Archives. On March 13th we informed both our membership and the community that we had joined with the City and other cultural institutions to do our share in slowing the spread by closing our facilities fully and stopping Society activities through March. We subsequently extended that closure indefinitely (keep an eye on our web and Facebook sites for updates).

That did not mean that we stopped moving forward as appropriate. Construction has continued on the landscape rehabilitation, our SDSU interns moved to on-line tasks and we have done our best to respond to research requests and sales of books.

"President's Address" Continued on Page 3

"President's Address" Continued from Page 2

Of course, we have had to cancel our scheduled Meet Up at Wine Works and postpone work on the next Roundtable. Community events such as the Rolando Street Fair and Flag Day Parade have been postponed or cancelled.

"Special" Election - Normally this issue of the Lookout Avenue would announce the details of the Annual Meeting and Board of Directors Elections. At time of publication we will not be able to hold a large gathering per State and County guidelines (Our original plan was to hold it in June at the McKinney House to show off the completion of Phase I of the Rehabilitation).

Subsequently, we have included the new slate of LMHS Board Officers and Directors for member ratification in this newsletter for your review. The Society will be emailing Members directly on June 1st for their ratification of the proposed slate as required prior to June 30th of each year. A link to the on-line survey monkey will be provided in that email. For those without email, we will ask you to call in your vote to our answering machine (a bit of living history!). Board Slate ratification voting will close on June 28th (see Page 8 of this newsletter for slate).

Thank you for your understanding with this unique request. Please know that we will definitely hold the on-site "Annual Meeting and Awards" event as soon as it is appropriate to do so.

We also want to thank you all for YOUR sacrifices as we all contribute to keeping this pandemic from reeking further tragedy on our nation and community. We are all making significant efforts to do our part. As with any stressful situations, there are phases of fear, anger and frustration that we will all need to handle.

In this issue we have a new article to help remind us all that this isn't the first time La Mesans have had to endure viral threats that led to community shutdowns, cancelled events, and school closures. In the Summer of 1948 La Mesa was hit with a threat that required similar community sacrifices.

We are also providing a link to an article on our website for all of you disappointed SDSU Aztec basketball fans who were deprived of watching our local 30-2, 5th ranked team make a March Madness run in 2020. I have updated my 2011 article on our 1941 National Champion Aztec hoopsters to help remind us of the values of teamwork, sacrifice and determination that lead to legendary performances (and the local connections to that first Aztec Hoop Dynasty).

Finally, we must thank all of you that have contributed to our Landscape Rehab. Your donations have covered nearly all of our Phase I costs. Note that the Phase II Fund Raising Campaign will begin soon for the planting and interpretive aspects of the Rehab Plan. For more information on how to help, contact Tracey Stotz.

As always, thanks for your support, WE KNOW THAT WE ALL SEE YOU SOON. Feel free to contact me at info@lamesahistory.com with your thoughts.

Take care of yourselves, your families and our community.

Jim Newland

Jim Newland
LMHS President



FOR THE RECORD
ARCHIVE'S REPORT

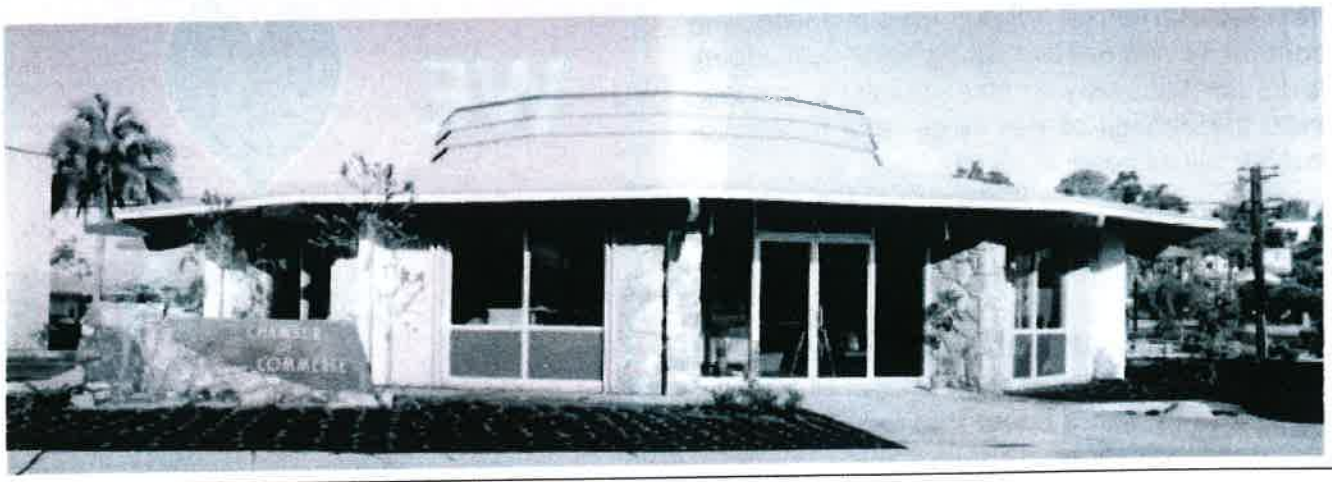
Although our Archives and Research Room has been temporarily closed due to COVID-19 since March, it was a very busy and popular place up through February. Our dedicated regular Archive volunteers including Donna Niemeier, Julie Dement and Jim & Charlene Craig could be found each Saturday with archivist Veronica Martzahl and historian Jim Newland processing collections and helping researchers learn more about their homes, families, businesses and neighborhoods in the Greater La Mesa area.

In addition, we initially had three SDSU history student interns in the archives as well. Aida Sirvani took on the processing, documenting and cataloging of prominent local architect Robert Des Lauriers' scrapbooks. Alaina Nakoski helped inventory and catalog some of the massive La Mesa Women's Club collection. We also had Sara Fakhoury researching topics and preparing posts for our Society social media. Although we were not able to meet in person starting in March, just as they had to do for all their classes, they adapted to an "on-line" component to complete their internships. We certainly thank them for their efforts during these trying times. Congratulations as well to both Aida and Sara who graduated this Spring. Go Aztecs!

RE-OPENING DATE & PROCEDURES?
Of course, with uncertainty as to when and how social distancing restrictions will be lifted, we will likely have to move to scheduled appointments for the initial re-opening of the Research Room to control the research "crowds." Please keep following our website and social media pages for news on dates and procedures for re-opening our archives. Thanks for all your support.



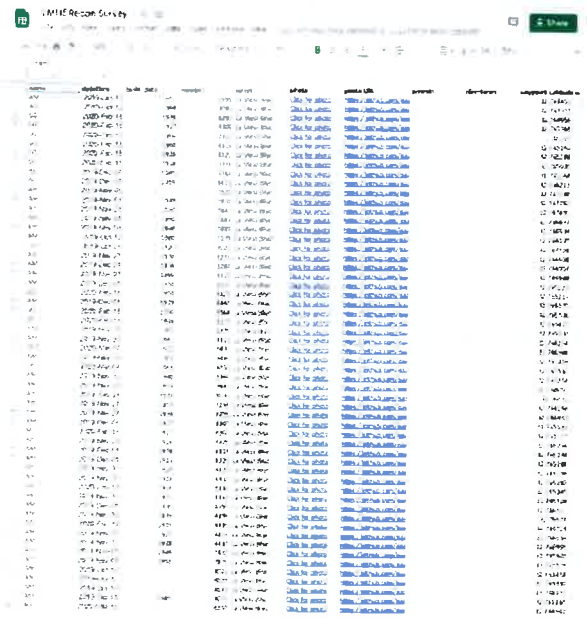
Above: Noted La Mesa architect Robert Des Lauriers in front of his offices.
Below: Des Lauriers La Mesa Chamber of Commerce building, Nebo Drive at University (demolished).



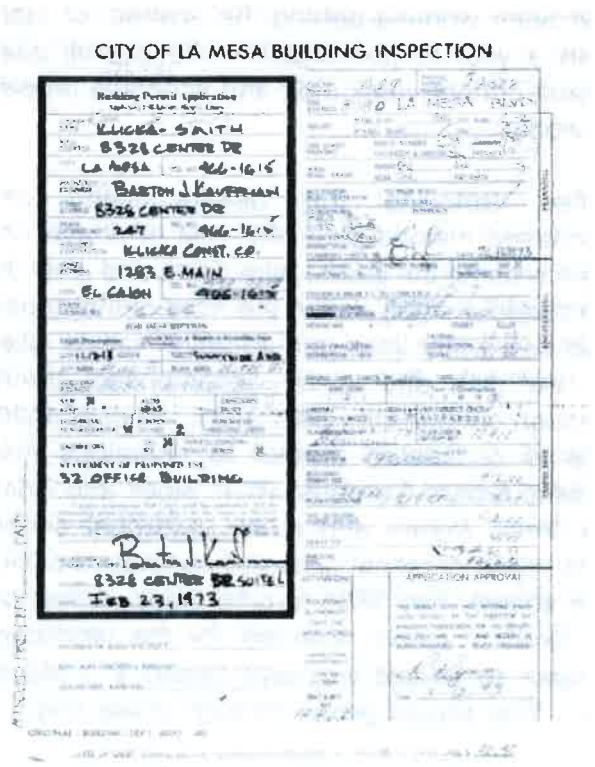
HISTORIC PROPERTY SURVEY INTERNS

Thanks to both SDSU anthropology professor Issac Ullah and history professor David Cline we also had five additional student interns working in support of the Society and SDSU partnership with the City of La Mesa's Historic Property Survey update.

Archaeology students Karyme Castro, Doug Cooper, Sam Gerstein, and Becky Kennedy helped test out the survey application that Dr. Ullah has developed in recording properties and their potential historical characteristics. In addition, history student Tiffany Foster assisted with gathering building permits from the City Planning Department. After the shutdown, the students adapted to online research to help put together their work for completing assessments of what properties might have enough historical interest to be further documented.



We once again thank our SDSU partners in testing out, during challenging times, our tools and processes for moving the City historical survey forward.



Left: Survey Database page of inventoried properties completed
Above. Example City Building Permit compiled by SDSU interns in Spring 2020.

MCKINNEY HOUSE LANDSCAPE PROJECT UNDERWAY

"There are so many facets to the landscape project which aren't always apparent to someone driving by," said Vice President Tracey Stotz, chair of the Landscape Committee. The committee, which includes Board members Kristin Dooley, Jim Newland, and Alex Quintero, has been working behind the scenes for more than a year to pull together the overall plan, recruit donors, seek bids and schedule phases of work.

"After removing the beetle-infested and deceased historic pine, the rest of phase one was to demo the grass, take down and level the yard, add a small wall in the front of the house, add new water lines and irrigation valves, plant a new pine and install decomposed granite through out the site," said Stotz. Most of phase one is completed thanks to donations from Artistic Arbors Gardens, RCP Block and Brick, La Mesa Rotary and many individual donors who made personal gifts and purchased bricks. We already had $860 in gifts made in memory of Gordon Jones reserved for the landscape project so all told we have raised $13,360 so far. That should get us through phase one.

As soon as the site dries out we will be compacting the yard and bringing in the decomposed granite to provide the yard a more historic ranch feel. After that supporter Don Cary is ready to donate his services to paint the McKinney House and Behr paint is lined up to donate product. From there we plan to finish the fence (it won't be as tall as the wood posts currently out front which will be cut down) and add plants including moving the memorial rose garden to the front of the house. Fundraising still needs to be done for these and the additional phases of the plan, which are spelled out on the site schematic that reflects the McKinney House's interpretive period (1908-1920). Future components include:

- A trellis extending from the house to provide shade for programming
- A large display structure near the Archives Building to permanently display large objects such as a printing press from The La Mesa Scout and historic signage
- Interpretive signage throughout the site

The on-going fundraising campaign to fund the project is "Buy A Brick." The inscribed bricks, each $100, will wind throughout the front yard of the property. The first order of bricks has been placed and will be installed after the decomposed granite is in. A second order will be send it once we reach the order minimum. CLICK HERE TO BUY A BRICK.

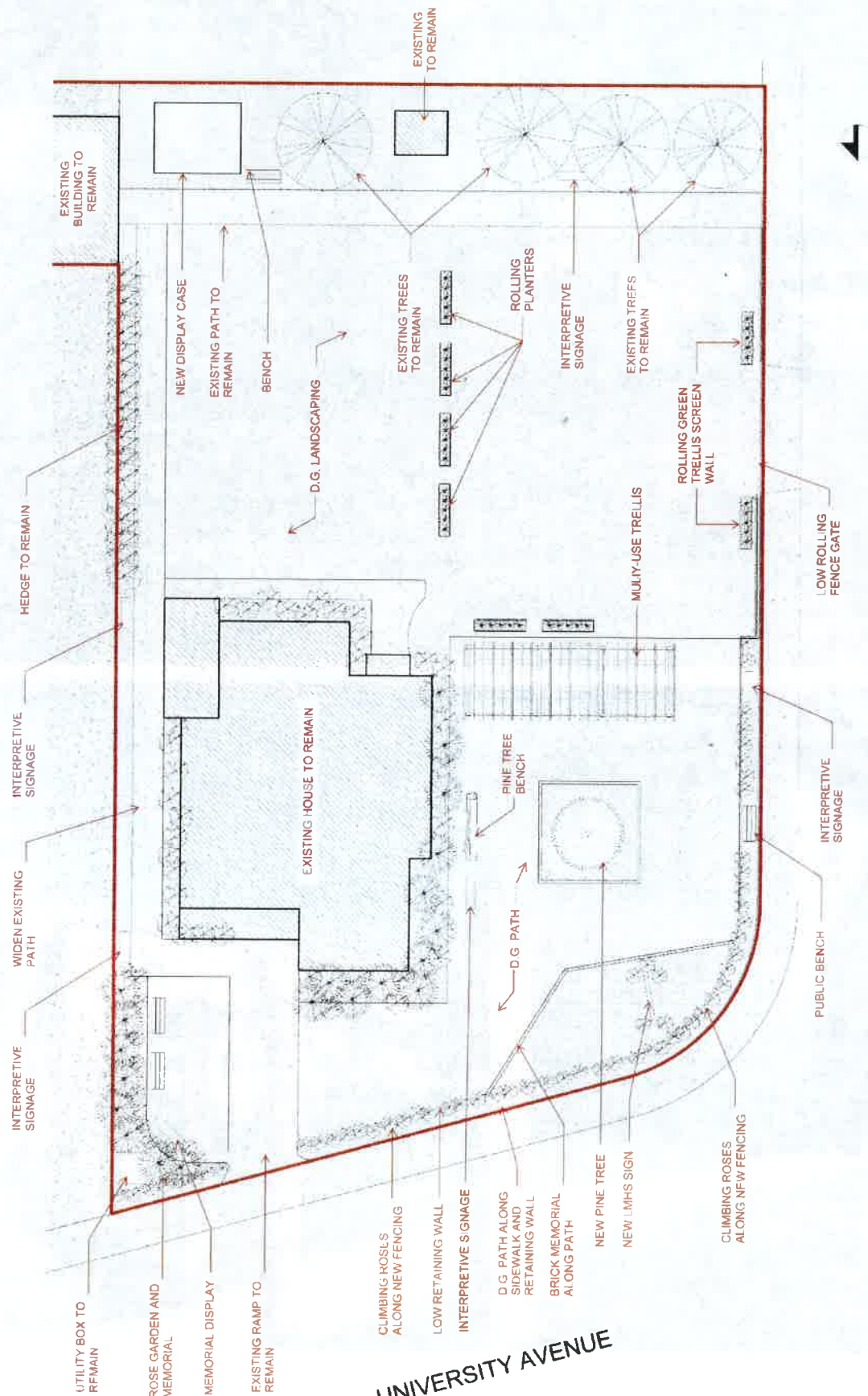
"Our original intent was to have a ribbon cutting ceremony this summer when phase one was complete but at press time we were unsure what virus safety guidelines would permit," Stotz stated. The website, lamesahistory.com, will have more details on upcoming events once the site is open.

If you have would like to help with the project please email info@lamesahistory.com or call (619) 466-0197.

Author Tracey Stotz, LMHS Vice President

"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 7

"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 6



McKinney House Proposed Landscape Plan
Drawn by Alexander Quintero, LMHS Director

"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 8

"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 7





"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 9

"McKinney House Landscape" Continued on Page 8





2020 LMHS ELECTIONS

LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2020/21 PROPOSED SLATE

Officers (1 year term)

President – James Newland

Vice President – Veronica Martzahl

Secretary – Sharon Smith

Treasurer – Tracey Stotz

VP Membership – Sheryl Castro

Board Nominees (2 year term)

Melody Andrews

Donna Bloomer

Don Cary

Steven Churchill

Michele Greenberg-McClung

Still on the Board through June 2021

David Cline

Kari Dodson

Kristin Dooley

Dave Kesner

Instructions for the 2020/21 Board of Directors Election

Members will be sent a link to an online survey on June 1st. For those members who are not online, you may call the Society at 619-466-0107 and leave your vote on the answering machine. Voting will close on Sunday June 28th at 5pm PST.

SUMMER 1948: WHEN LA MESA WAS LAST SHUTTERED BY A VIRUS:

SACRIFICING FOR THEMSELVES, THEIR NEIGHBORS AND THEIR COMMUNITY

Parallels to Today?

A time of an invisible viral public health threat, with community, commercial, educational, religious and sporting events cancelled. Families and children shuttered at home, all restricted from personally connecting with friends, family or able to congregate in groups—whether at businesses, schools, clubs, parks or churches. The proposed remedies to this threat resulted in a frustrating upending of "regular" life in La Mesa, the County, the State and the Country.

It was a malady that was not completely unfamiliar. It had presented itself here before. As such many assumed it was somewhat controllable. But this time public health officials saw it primed to strike at an aggressively exponential rate—and with most devastating and lethal results. Serious and unprecedented actions were recommended—then required and implemented.

La Mesa Community leaders took the public health official's recommendations seriously. Too seriously, some thought. Did they not understand the economic or societal impact of their decisions? La Mesa residents, the local business community and the whole region were being forced into sacrificing their own needs, desires and livelihoods to protect people they likely never met, or never would--from an unseen, phantom threat. Could it really be that bad? Would our neighboring communities also comply? When would these seemingly draconian containment measures end? Would our businesses survive? Our social, civic, educational and religious institutions endure?

For those suffering through the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 these descriptions may have a disturbingly familiar ring. But in fact, these descriptions date back over 70 years, to La Mesa in the Summer 1948. The viral threat was not a novel coronavirus but the infantile paralysis virus—commonly known as polio. Although the malady was different, the polio epidemic story has many parallels to today's pandemic.

La Mesa in 1948

In 2020 the City of La Mesa has some 60,000 residents living within a mostly developed nine-square mile area. In 1948 La Mesa's population was estimated at a bit more than 9,000 on its way to the 10,946 residents that would be counted in the 1950 Census. Though small compared to today, the City had seen a doubling of its population since 1940.

The City's eastern and southern limits were similar to today but the land north of Alvarado Canyon was not yet annexed or developed beyond the few poultry farms that covered old

"Summer 1948" Continued on Page 12

"Summer 1948" Continued from Page 11

Maryland Heights as it was then called, to the south and east of Lake Murray.

U.S. Highway 80 still followed today's El Cajon Boulevard (the Alvarado Canyon Freeway—location of today's Interstate 8—not opening until January 1950). There was no Grossmont Hospital (opened 1955) or Grossmont Center (opened 1961). Mostly dusty, scrub covered hills and the newly developing Fletcher Hills community north of the region's only high school—venerable Grossmont High. Spring Street went no farther south than Pasadena Avenue and access to Spring Valley and Lemon Grove was via Palm Avenue past Collier Park, or on the east down Bancroft Drive (Bancroft Freeway, now State Route 125, would not open until 1957).

Mt Nebo and its 1920s Windsor Hills subdivision were yet to be filled in, nor was there any residential development to the west on the future Eastridge. The president-named streets of the Boulevard Tract near new Lemon Avenue School (1942) were rapidly filling with new small houses. La Mesa Highlands to the southeast of downtown still featured as many orchards as houses. The western slope of Mt Helix was also an equal mix of residences and avocados.

Downtown La Mesa was the regional commercial center with its businesses serving not only the City of La Mesa residents, but the unincorporated communities of Rolando, Maryland Heights, Grossmont, Mt Helix, Lemon Grove and Spring Valley. La Mesa's mayor during the WWII boom years, Ben Polak, had just left office but was in charge of The Greater La Mesa Committee (GLMC). Polak had organized the Committee to help raise funds for the development of the newly purchased MacArthur Park property as well as a planned war memorial building and civic center.

The new city park was important to the civic health of the community. Anticipating the soon-to-be baby booming Post-WWII La Mesa, plans for another high school (Helix High, opened in 1952) and multiple new elementary schools were underway. La Mesa Dale (1946) and Rolando (1947) being the first to open after the War. Therefore, in 1948 the City opened the Youth Building in MacArthur Park (still in use today, next to the Community Center Building) to serve the growing number of children in the suburban city. Youth recreation programs, along with adult baseball and softball leagues at Lyles Field (site of the current Police Station) were popular. In 1947 the Greater La Mesa Committee had created the "Tacky Wacky Carnival" (the name coming from a popular Grossmont High annual event), in concert with the long-standing August Fiésta de las Flores Flower Show. The Carnival served as a fund raiser for the Park and the Committee's improvement plans.



Aerial photo of downtown La Mesa, 1949. Allison Avenue in center of image. MacArthur Park with youth building in left middle. Helix Theater in far right lower corner.

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"Summer 1948" Continued from Page 12

The Summer of 1948 started out as planned. The City offered many youth programs to fill the empty summer days and provide relief for La Mesa's predominately stay-at-home mothers--once school was out that June. Summer camps, from Boy and Girl Scouts to church sponsored camps along with crafts and organized sports (especially baseball) were scheduled and popular. Civic leaders were working on an even bigger Flower Show and Tacky Wacky Carnival to top the previous year's event. The Aztec Riding Club along with the American Legion planned expansion of their popular horse show, parade and dance as a La Mesa summer highlight.

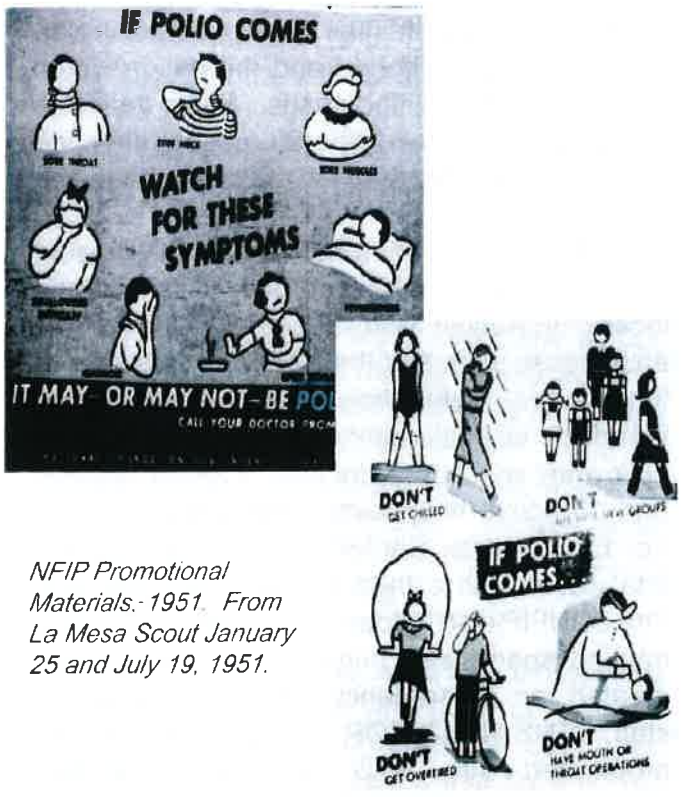
But then, the well-known viral scourge of the early twentieth century made its uninvited appearance like never before.

The National Scourge of Polio

Infantile paralysis, caused by the poliovirus and better known as polio, had been a threat in the United States since its identification in the 1890s. Polio would strike tens of thousands of Americans in the first half of the 20th century, mostly children, but adults were not immune. Its most famous victim being future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who contracted the disease in 1921 at age 39. The disease attacked the central nervous system often resulting in temporary or permanent paralysis, and sometimes death. Children on crutches or hospital wards full of large metal tube-like "Iron Lung" machines (that helped polio victims who could not breath on their own) became symbols of the indiscriminate and lethal nature of the virus.

Polio outbreaks tended to occur in the Summer months. With no initial prevention, cure or warning of its arrival, the public was understandably frightened. Uncertain to the actual cause, theories on its sources were widespread, causing much speculation fueled by fear and ignorance, which also led to unfounded efforts at great and desperate cures and treatments (Many communities resorted to aerial spraying of the defoliant DDT, falsely assuming that flies carried the virus—and before DDTs long-term dangers were known). Some thought polio was waterborne, and thus communities usually closed public swimming pools, beaches and lakes. Social distancing was one of the few treatments that provided some reduction of the virus' spread. Once a case had arrived in their communities, public health and civic leaders banned children from crowded environments (theaters, bowling alleys, restaurants), attending large events and were not allowed to gather socially or play organized sports.

Nationally, the Roosevelt Administration in the 1930s worked to raise money for research and treatment of polio victims. The March of Dimes campaign being one of the most successful and significant philanthropy efforts ever created. Focusing on obtaining small amounts from the general public over large donations from wealthy donors, its annual campaigns revolutionized health care fundraising. The subsequent National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis establishing branches throughout the country, including San Diego County.



NFIP Promotional Materials. 1951. From La Mesa Scout January 25 and July 19, 1951.

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Outbreaks were known throughout the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s, but especially after the restrictions of World War II were lifted in the late 1940s and the Baby Boom hit, polio increased in number of cases and severity.

Dr. Jonas Salk's development of the vaccine that would lead to the eradication of polio in the United States was still a decade away.

Post-War Polio Build-Up

La Mesans had some experience with polio prior to that fateful Summer of 1948. Reports recalled the first serious outbreak in 1924. Two fatal cases occurred that year, killing two children, one from La Mesa and one from Spring Valley. La Mesa Grammar School (the only school in La Mesa-Spring Valley School District in 1924) officials closed for two weeks in November of that year to halt the spread among their over 200 students. Local residents quarantined their children from crowds and public gatherings until restrictions were lifted in December.

Each Summer La Mesans, as with others in San Diego County, California and the nation would await word of identified cases. Some years La Mesa had no or few reported cases, although many in the County recalled 1934 as a bad year.

As noted, in the year's after WWII the volume of cases steadily increased both nationally and locally. In August 1946 San Diego County saw an increase such that the San Diego Chapter of the National Foundation (SDNFIP) helped pay for additional equipment and trained staff for the polio ward at County Hospital. County hospital had 13 active hospitalized cases that August. For East County, Santee had experienced two fatal cases with a third serious case reported. The SDNFIP also helped in recruiting, hiring and training specialized nurses after the upsurge created an "emergency need" for qualified staff. "THE NEED FOR NURSES IS GREAT!" proclaimed Mrs. M.D. Boucher, Executive Secretary of the SDNFIP.

In that same August 23, 1946 La Mesa Scout article, the polio outbreak hit home with the announcement of two community cases. As a result, the City ended its summer recreation programs at the Lemon Avenue and La Mesa Grammar schools early at the request of the County Health Department. Over 150 La Mesa youngsters were left disappointedly separated from their friends for the remainder of that summer.

School still started on time the week after Labor Day as two weeks later S.E. Davis, SDNFIP Chairman spoke to the La Mesa Kiwanis, reporting that the peak of the polio outbreak locally had apparently passed. Davis' lecture was covered fully in the Scout. He noted that generally two-thirds of the victims were children age 6 to 13 and that polio victims had a roughly 50-50 chance of full recovery with about a 2 to 3% fatality rate. He reiterated that swimming pools were considered especially troublesome as many believed that victims whose "vitality is lowered, being apt to overexert themselves" made them more susceptible to the disease.


LA MESA, CALIFORNIA, FRIDAY, JA

Brownie Troop 94 Makes $10 Donation

Local Brownie Troop Makes Donation to 1947 March of Dimes Campaign, La Mesa Scout, January 31, 1947.

"Summer 1948" Continued on Page 15

"Summer 1948" Continued from Page 14

Polio dropped out of the local headlines until January 1947 when La Mesa's annual March of Dimes campaign got underway with much more attention than in previous years. The La Mesa Junior Chamber of Commerce, supported by the GLMC took on the lead for the campaign. La Mesa's interest in the cause was clear as donations came in from La Mesa Grammar School students and families ($500), local Girl Scout and Brownie troops, service clubs and businesses. By March La Mesans had raised over $2,300 for the polio fight by placement of coin boxes at over 40 businesses along with two big benefit events.

That summer of 1947 the City and Community organizations continued to plan for a typical schedule of events and programs. The Tacky Wacky Carnival was extended to a full week, scheduled for August 18-24th. One of the new events being a Baby Beauty Show. Notably, the event was designed to never have more than 10 children congregated at any time during the event to avoid transmission potential. The Carnival week went forward, as did all other youth programming that summer in La Mesa with no interruptions.

As 1948 arrived, the annual March of Dimes campaign went forward again in late January. Led by insurance agent, and future mayor, Ray Fellows (1962-70), the campaign set out over 200 coin boxes throughout the community.

Summer 1948: Polio Threat Arrives Suddenly

Early summer 1948 started similarly to that of the uneventful 1947 season. Polio cases trickled in around the county through June. Then in early July the County Hospital's polio contagion ward saw a rapid increase to 18 cases with additional cases under study. Although there were four men aged 26 to 31, the majority were children under 8 years old, including an 8-month old baby. Six post-polio cases had recently been moved to the Children's Convalescent Hospital for long-term treatment and physical therapy.

In the July 8th issue of the La Mesa Scout, Dr. Alex Lesem, who was the San Diego City-County health officer, had attended a GLMC meeting and provided a stern warning to his La Mesa audience that the County's polio case load was growing exponentially after the previous July 4th weekend's events. Over 16 new cases, ranging from Ramona, Lakeside, National City, Chula Vista, Lemon Grove, El Cajon and Spring Valley had suddenly appeared. Dr. Lesem clearly identified the need for avoiding personal contact, especially as he addressed our community--for La Mesa's children.

Dr. Lesem's directives were highlighted in the front page article:
...he definitely warned parents to keep their children away from crowds; to refrain from taking them to public places and to keep them away from playmates who do not feel well.

He also stated that he was "seriously concerned" over the unusually high and sudden incidence of polio cases, although he was at the time unwilling to "definitely state" that "we will have an epidemic of poliomyelitis this summer." Within a few days Dr. Lesem's epidemic assessment would change.

Although the Scout article's headline noted that "La Mesa Was Clear of Polio," the City and Community leaders would move quickly to ensure that they continued to be so, especially considering the threats of nearby surrounding cases.

With new polio cases announced daily in the San Diego Union, the County reclassified the outbreak as an epidemic a few days later and sent a bulletin calling for communities to implement serious preventive actions to hold down the spread.

The City of La Mesa responded immediately. The headline of the July 15, 1948 Scout explained the actions to be undertaken:

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"Summer 1948" Continued from Page 15

Close Camps, Gillespie Pool, Public Meets in Polio Fight:
La Mesa Area Starts House to House Fight to Prevent Spread of Polio Cases.

Mayor Enoch Anderson announced on July 15th that immediately all city summer recreation programs were to be cancelled. A general shutdown of all other camps, swimming pools (including El Cajon's regionally serving Gillespie Pool, site of the WWII Marine training facility and now site of the current airport), and all other public recreation facilities were implemented. Community institutions also responded immediately cancelling church programs and camps including those of La Mesa's St. Andrews Episcopal and Central Congregational.



LA MESA SCOUT

4108

Close Camps, Gillespie Pool, Public Meets In Polio Fight

City Allows About 10 Per Cent Overall Increase In Employe Pay Checks

Fire Losses In 10 Days Total Over $145,000

All That Remains Of Cruz Residence

LM Area Starts House To House Fight To Prevent Spread Of Polio Cases

LM Electric Is Only Unbeaten Softball Club

City Inspects Claims Laid To Oil-Mix Plant

Front page of July 15, 1948 La Mesa Scout.

At a meeting of City and Community leaders, Mrs. Sarah "Nan" Couts quickly brought her leadership and the La Mesa Welfare Association to the cause. Now known as the legendary "grande dame" of La Mesa ladies, Mrs. Couts had originally organized the Welfare Association in 1934 to provide relief to those La Mesans in need of support during the Great Depression. The Association had also played a large role in civil defense and overall community service during World War II.

Under Mrs. Couts leadership our local ladies quickly moved to help spread the word. Armed with 5,000 flyers, they moved to a "house to house" survey to provide recommendations on how best to identify common symptoms and properly quarantine, along with passing on accurate information on the real and destructive threats of unchecked polio. The information campaign was supported by the SDNFIP, who provided both the information and funding support.

Within a week, La Mesa City and Community leaders met to address how best to cooperate with the County's public health directives. Scout editor H.C. Reed reported thoroughly in the July 22, 1948 edition how it was quite clear that La Mesans had come together decisively with:

"...an almost spontaneous and wholehearted spirit to which everyone in La Mesa and this area have responded to meet what appears to be a serious situation resulting...of a health crisis of infantile paralysis...which indicates we are now in a period of epidemic...and that every possible precaution be exercised to bring the disease under control and prevent further spread."

He commented on their proactive approach, "While it is encouragingly true that La Mesa proper has thus far suffered less than most other communities, local people, nevertheless, in all walks of life, have responded in a marvelous way to cooperate with health, medical and other agencies who are charged with the responsibility of guarding the public welfare."

Reed reported that "Following a series of conferences by individual groups during the past few days, there was a meeting at City Hall that was attended by representatives from all groups in the community having to do with public functions of any nature." He added the nearly all public, civic, business and community institutions were on board. The City Hall meeting being "held for the purpose of an overall consideration of the problem with which we are confronted, and a recommendation of uniform and proper action."

The resulting public statement unanimously being approved by all attendees that:

"...it was agreed to urge all La Mesans to hold off on any activity planned for July, August and September until such time as the polio crisis is leveling off."

"Summer 1948" Continued on Page 17

"Summer 1948" Continued from Page 16

The list of cancelled events and programs was comprehensive. The Aztec Riders Club (who still led rides down undeveloped Alvarado Canyon) and the American Legion (in the process of building their new lodge building on University Avenue) cancelling their early August parade ride, horse show and dance. The Tacky Wacky Carnival and Fiesta de Los Flores flower show scheduled in late August also were cancelled. Both organizations recognizing that already expended funds would be sacrificed to the public health cause with no subsidy.

Churches and businesses also joined in. Sunday school programs and church camps were cancelled. La Mesa Theater owner Burton Jones closed the only movie theater in town and noted that his brand new and nearly ready to open Helix Theater (near the corner of La Mesa Boulevard and University) would have its long-awaited opening event delayed.

All those in attendance recognized that there would be serious loss of business and city revenues due to the action, but that the fear of having La Mesa invite all those coming from other communities where polio was already clearly present—was a risk they did not wish to impose on the community's children.

Over the next few weeks the number of cases spread rapidly across the County. County hospital doubled its cases and the number of deaths also rose. By July 28 the County had set a record with 119 polio cases for the year. The more than a dozen fatalities ranged from an 8-month old baby to a 26-year old San Diego man. Subsequently the initial La Mesa quarantine measures aimed at mostly children were soon spread to adults as well. The City cancelling their popular softball leagues at the city fields (now the site of the current Police Station on Allison Avenue) as did the private Vista La Mesa league in that unincorporated community (later annexed into La Mesa).

The rapid spread of polio throughout the County also drew a critical response from La Mesa officials. La Mesa leaders appeared to be the only City to take on the severe quarantine restrictions that other county jurisdictions had shunned.

As reported in the July 29th Scout the Greater La Mesa Committee adopted a detailed motion condemning the County for its "indefinite" stand on public gatherings that they assumed had allowed for the record spread. The La Mesans' motion informing the County Health Department that the County's position would waste the sacrifices, both social and financial, that La Mesans had made already. They also castigated County leaders for "placing loss of life ahead of financial return."

The Scout also reported that although the City of La Mesa still had no cases in July, that 8 year old Peck Kornik of Grossmont had contracted a case from his attendance at a Lakeside summer camp, and that 12 year old Donna Rae Peterson of Lemon Grove had sadly become the sixteenth county polio fatality.



SCOUT, LA MESA, CALIFORNIA, JULY 29, 1948

LM, Alone In Cancelling Meetings Account Polio, Scores County Healthers

"Whereas the City of La Mesa and various organizations working on public events already scheduled for July, August and September have cancelled their activities to prevent further spread of the polio epidemic; and

"Whereas, these cancellations have been at a financial sacrifice to these organizations; and

"Whereas, these organizations felt it a public duty, placing loss of life or impairment for life ahead of financial return:

"Now, therefore, be it and it is hereby resolved by the Greater La Mesa Committee that we condemn the San Diego County Health Department for its failure to come out with definite recommendations regarding public gatherings in the various communities during the present infantile Paralysis epidemic; and

"Be it further resolved that we believe it is the duty of the San Diego County Health Department to make positive recommendations that all public gatherings be cancelled until such time as this epidemic has been satisfactorily checked; and

"Be it further resolved, that it is the responsibility of the San Diego County Health Department to lead the way; and

"Be it further resolved, that the Secretary of this Committee is instructed to send copies of this resolution to the Board of Supervisors of San Diego County, to each Chamber of Commerce in San Diego County, to each organization represented in the Greater La Mesa Committee and to other Civic Organizations in the Greater La Mesa Area.

"Passed and adopted this 29th day of July, 1948.

BENJAMIN POLAK
Chairman, Greater La Mesa Committee."

Greater La Mesa Committee, which originated the Tacky-Wacky Carnival La Mesa has staged in recent years, cancelled it entirely for this year on receipt of a statement from directors of the Chamber of Commerce, which is the legal sponsor of Tacky-Wacky now, recommended cancellation.

The Chamber's recommendation cited the "dangerous" epidemic; noted La Mesa has no polio cases and that "our interest is in the City of La Mesa and we would like to keep our community free of this disease."

Mr Polak noted that The American Legion and Aztec Riders have deferred their parade, dance and horse show until September 18 and 19, past the expected levelling off of polio cases, and urged all organizations represented in Greater La Mesa Committee and all La Mesa citizens to assist "in this worthwhile project."

GLMC Resolution, July 29, 1948 La Mesa Scout.

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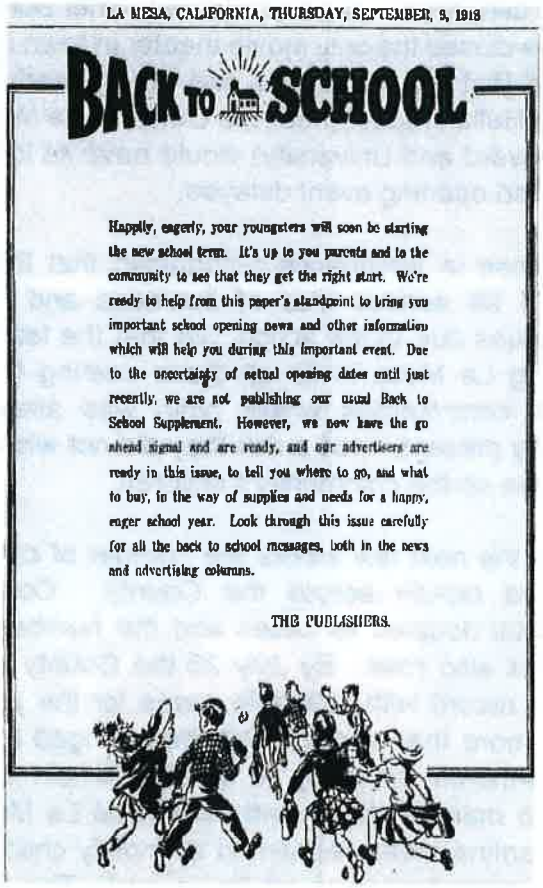
Still, La Mesa's efforts in August continued to reap protective benefits. The August 19th Scout reporting that La Mesa was grateful for its continued absence of polio cases. The Greater La Mesa Committee touted their success. The County continued to be a target for chastisement for not requiring similar measures as La Mesa had undertaken during the epidemic peak. Their challenges receiving a defensive response from County Supervisor Board Chair DeGraff Austin. Subsequently La Mesans did want to make sure that they did not flaunt their successes while others had suffered. As such the La Mesa Committee announced plans to raise funds for a new iron lung for the County Hospital in the Fall.

Threat Subsides, Now Back to School?

By late August the County announced that although a record year for polio cases, that the peak had been reached and new cases were decreasing. As Labor Day approached, La Mesa faced the next key question—when to reopen their schools. Although Dr. Lesem and State health leaders issued an announcement in late August allowing local school districts the authority to open their schools as they felt appropriate, many La Mesa parents voiced concerns over sending their children back.

Grossmont High School principal Lewis Smith was the first to respond. Although Grossmont hoped to open on Monday September 12th as originally scheduled, parents were given the option to hold back their students. In the meantime, a significant number of parents had questioned the High School's opening plan. As such, Principal Smith recognized that a "very high absentee percentage" would occur and agreed to a delayed opening on September 20th. A major challenge to Grossmont's opening was also its use of its feeder district buses to get students to campus from the large, mostly rural union high school district. Once it was announced that Lemon Grove, Cajon Valley and Alpine School Districts were delaying their school openings one week to prepare campuses, access for many of the high school students from those areas was impacted.

The La Mesa-Spring Valley School District (LMSVSD) considered a similar plan for their scheduled Monday September 12th opening. Dr. David Jessop, LMSVSD Board Trustee announced that parents not wishing to send their children had that option to hold them back for now. Jessop was quoted that the District had consulted with state and local health officials and "had not talked to any doctor opposed to the school opening." He added that "arguments in favor of opening the schools include: the strict medical supervision that will be maintained over the students, more regular eating habits and other factors" such as controlled exercise to reduce exertion. Over exertion being considered a significant factor in children contracting polio.



LA MESA, CALIFORNIA, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER, 9, 1948

BACK TO SCHOOL

Happily, eagerly, your youngsters will soon be starting the new school term. It's up to you parents and to the community to see that they get the right start. We're ready to help from this paper's standpoint to bring you important school opening news and other information which will help you during this important event. Due to the uncertainty of actual opening dates until just recently, we are not publishing our usual Back to School Supplement. However, we now have the go ahead signal and are ready, and our advertisers are ready in this issue, to tell you where to go, and what to buy, in the way of supplies and needs for a happy, eager school year. Look through this issue carefully for all the back to school messages, both in the news and advertising columns.

THE PUBLISHERS.

La Mesa Scout, September 9, 1948

The following weeks Scout reported that both the high school and grammar schools rapidly moved back into typical school year activities. Sports, clubs and arts events re-started and school life reengaged.

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Similarly, September articles noted that membership drives also re-started for Boy and Girl Scout troops, church youth organizations and recreational activities. The re-scheduled Aztec Riding Club/American Legion parade, horse show and dance was held in late September with much fanfare—and children invited.

As October arrived, it appeared that La Mesa had returned to regular daily life, void of the overbearing fear of the invisible viral threat.

Making "Lemonade" Out of A Sour Situation

In September, the Scout editors presented some of the first reflective, and "lighter" recollections of the community's collective quarantine experience. A September 2nd article provided a bit of a tongue-in-cheek, semi-sarcastic headline: "Polio Gives People Frist Opportunity to Know Their Own Family."

As many have found out today as their "light-speed racing" daily lives have been slowed down due to the COVID-19, even in the pre-television, no cell phone or internet days of 1948—quarantine had forced parents and young people to spend far more time together than previously either were used to experiencing.

The article, compiled from input of the San Diego Recreation Department, noted the following as unexpected opportunities that families of 1948 should consider to pass the quarantine, such as: actually having dinner together; backyard dining [remember this is pre-air conditioning era]; card games (Hearts, Rummy, Old Maid); table games (Parchesi, checkers, Monopoly); word games (20 questions); games of skill (tossing clothes pins into milk bottles, stacking toothpicks, jacks); dramatics (charades, pantomines, readings) and musical activities (sing-a-longs, instrumental recitals) along with outdoor yard games such as badminton, croquet, and table tennis.

Perhaps the most entertaining—and honestly bittersweet remembrance--came from Mrs. Helen Crosbie. Helen, who with husband, Dr. Glen Crosbie (a veterinarian and a future La Mesa Mayor), and their four children had recently moved to La Mesa. The Scout published her family's quarantine story in the September 23rd issue.

Helen's memoir carried the not-so-subtle headline: **"Polio-Martyred Mother Bares Sufferings With Kids at Home Months"**

The young mother started the narrative with bemoaning her fate of a summer "marooned" with her four youngsters, all trapped in their suburban home for two months solid. She recounted the challenges of keeping four children entertained, clean, fed--and separated from their friends--as required. She aptly recalled the challenges of keeping the kids from each others' throats--and well as her from "strangling" them—especially when they ventured out of the yard requiring "mom radar" to re-locate them. She frustratingly told stories of having the backyard re-organized into baseball diamonds, treehouse forts, fox-holes, and cowboy hideouts. Included was the story of converting an inflatable life-raft into a wading pool and "hair-pulling" horrors of bubble gum showing up everywhere—especially ON the kids.

Her initial hindsight-driven conclusion, that if she had known in May what she knew in September: "I probably would have shot myself!" Of course with further hindsight, she had reduced her overdramatic summation to "it wasn't too bad." Of course, she did remind us that she had to "keep telling herself, and telling herself and telling herself" of that conclusion.



LA MESA, CALIFORNIA, SEPTEMBER 23, 1948

Polio-Martyred Mother Bares Sufferings With 'Kids' At Home Months

La Mesa Scout, September 23, 1948

La Mesa Carries the Polio Fight Forward

La Mesa's efforts to keep the polio epidemic from causing significant impact likely helped accept

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its sacrifices to defeat this public health menace. La Mesans moved that Fall 1948 to help out their county neighbors who had not faired as well. They generously re-worked a planned fund-raising contest originally aimed for the Tacky Wacky Carnival. The "Mystery Mines Contest" was now used to raise funds for a new Iron Lung for County Hospital. Each week the Scout published clues as to the identification of 12 "famous and legendary" mines. Twelve local La Mesa businesses were randomly selected to represent these mines. Contestants would attempt to identify the businesses and the mines they represented from the clues. The popular contest quickly raised the necessary funds. In early October the Greater La Mesa Committee then provided County Hospital with another essential lifesaving Iron Lung machine.


LA MESA, CALIFORNIA, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1948

Lifesaver For Polio Sufferers Arrives

La Mesa's Iron Lung on display in SDGE Building, La Mesa to promote "Mystery Mines Contest", La Mesa Scout September 16, 1948

Less than a month later Committee Chairman Ben Polak received word that La Mesa's donation had saved a life. Local FBI agent Robert Sterling had been stricken with a case of polio. He had been saved due to the availability of the "La Mesa machine" and was starting to recover. The appreciation would result in a thank you from both local FBI office officials and a letter from long-serving, legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Over the next few years the La Mesa Iron Lung was somewhat of a celebrity. It was taken to local schools for assemblies on polio safety and prevention, as well as put on display at the County Fair at Del Mar in 1949.

The fight against polio returned in January 1949. That is when La Mesa renewed its annual March of Dimes Campaign. The GLMC, Chamber of Commerce and local service organizations and schools once again banded together. For the next five years La Mesa's "Block of Dimes" campaign would lead to thousands of dollars donated to the cause of polio prevention and treatment. The "Block of Dimes" name coming from the campaign event in which donors would set down dimes end to end on the sidewalk of La Mesa Boulevard from Spring Street to Palm Avenue. This added to March of Dimes boxes set up at many local businesses to collect donations.



La Mesa's Block of Dimes 1950 event. La Mesa Scout February 9, 1950.

The End to the Polio Threat

Over the next few years, polio would regularly return to the County. La Mesa was not immune and each year there were several local polio cases, but the threat never reached the severity of the Summer of 1948. Some La Mesa events were cancelled in 1949 but a major shutdown was avoided.

Although La Mesa and most of San Diego County survived the following years without another serious epidemic, polio continued to rage throughout the Country. In November 1950 one particular case, that affecting California Governor Earl Warren's youngest and photogenic 14-year old daughter Nina "Honey Bear" Warren drew national attention. Honey Bear's contraction of polio on the day of Warren's election to a third term as governor only reiterated the indiscriminate dangers of the viral menace. No one's family, no matter how powerful,

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wealthy or attractive was immune. Much to California and the nation's relief Honey Bear would recover fully by Christmas 1950. Yet, the national spotlight continued to focus funding and research on the efforts to eradicate polio.

Finally, in March 1953 39-year old Dr. Jonas Salk of the University of Pittsburgh's Virus Research Laboratory announced meaningful progress against the polio virus with plans for initial vaccine testing. Supported through National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis funding, the successful testing led to clinical trials. During 1954 the vaccine was tested on over one million school age children. By April 1955 it was announced that the vaccine was considered both safe and effective for distribution. Within two years the vaccine had been made available throughout the country. Whereas the U.S. had averaged near 50,000 cases annually in the Post-WWII years, by 1962 there were less than 1,000. By the 1990s, due to comprehensive vaccination, the World Health Organization determined the polio virus eliminated in the Western Hemisphere.

(Salk would receive worldwide recognition for his discovery. In 1963 the City of San Diego would gift 23 acres of land in La Jolla near the new UC San Diego campus for establishment of the Salk Institute. The Salk Institute continues today as a leader in medical research).

Parallels for Today?

Although this article does not intend to draw a comprehensive parallel between the actual threats of COVID-19 and polio (COVID-19 clearly appears to have more destructive potential), La Mesa's efforts to band together in the Summer of 1948 does provide many comparisons and some hope.

The suddenness of the viral attacks, the widespread fear, the draconian quarantine measures, the disruption on commercial, civic and community life and personal sacrifices for the common good seem familiar. The frustrations, often a result of the loss of personal control of our destinies in an already uncertain world, are real for us all—just as they had been back in 1948.

Esther Drew Long was a La Mesa Grammar School sixth grader in Summer of 1948. Her memories of the closed Gillespie Pool, local parks and the movie theaters (most La Mesans usual weekly stop for not only films, but news reels, and Saturday matinees and cartoons) are still vivid. She noted that this year's COVID-19 pandemic had led her and her contemporaries to compare this experience to their own particular polio threat memories—no matter where in the U.S. they grew up. She also noted that although very inconvenient and the closest experience to today's situation in her lifetime, polio did not compare to today's threats and disruptions.

Although we live in a far more connected world of cell phones and internet access than 1948, it is reassuring to see common human experiences and responses to dealing with homebound families forced together involuntarily and to the fears driven by an unseen adversary.

Certainly the fear of what permanent changes to our economic, civic and personal lives may result from the 2020 pandemic appear more severe, but perhaps we can hope that in hindsight of the current pandemic we will be able to find some new and better ways to make our collective lives better—and find some future comfort and hopefully some humor from our collective experiences—once the immediate threats have receded. Providing proof that our sacrifices were not in vain.

For now, it is a significant challenge to see past the immediately plight, but it is encouraging to know that La Mesa and its leaders in 1948 set forth and held fast to a decisive, consistent and courageous course of action in the face of their challenges. These leaders had the strength to persevere, with what turned out to be in the best interest of all La Mesans.

Jim Newland,
LMHS President (2020)

A BIT OF HISTORICAL SDSU MARCH MADNESS

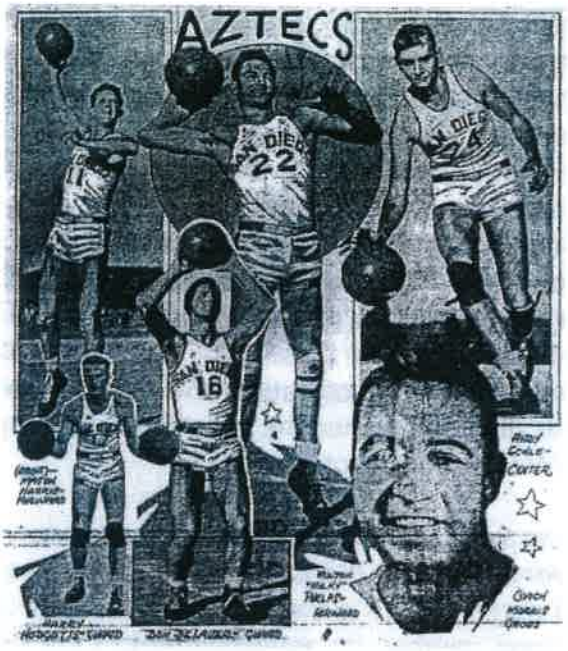
FOR BASKETBALL DEPRIVED 2020

Of course, there is no real substitute for not having our amazing 30-2 #6 ranked 2019-20 SDSU Men's Basketball team provided the opportunity to have proven itself in this year's now-cancelled NCAA tournament.

But their success still does give us a chance however to remember those long-ago days when San Diego State College was a powerhouse of the nation's small-college programs—and how their connection to some of our local "East San Diego and East County" boys made a huge contribution.

We have posted an updated version of Jim Newland's 2011 La Mesa Patch articles on our website of the story of what culminated in the **1941 National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball Champion Aztecs!**

We hope this will provide you with some distraction and warm feelings as we deal with our international public health challenges.



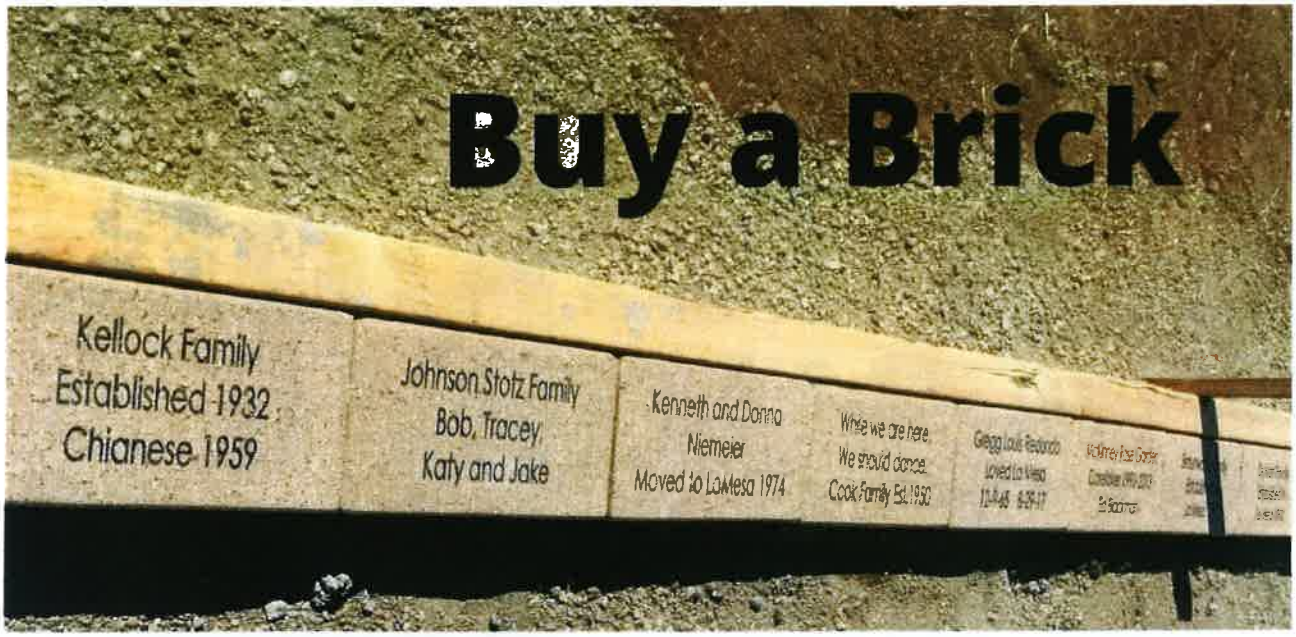
SDSC Aztec basketball team stars and Coach Gross from The Aztec campus newspaper, February 1940.


The Aztec
SAN DIEGO STATE COLLEGE
Aztec Cagers Cop National College Crown
Cabinet Sets Assembly, Picnic Date
RALLY SET 10:30 TONIGHT
Champs Sweep Top Selections

Headline of Aztec Championship, reporting of team tournament honors and Union Depot rally (The Aztec March 18, 1941).


The Aztec
SAN DIEGO STATE COLLEGE

1941 National Championship Team. (The Aztec, March 21, 1941)



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