

## Memories of Old La Mesa

by Roy Edwards (written in 1969)

When I first discovered La Mesa more than 40 years ago, the census bureau had last reported a population of around 1200. In those days, La Mesa Boulevard was Lookout Avenue and at its intersection with Spring Street, generally referred to as "Lookout and Jump", was the Bank of La Mesa, later to become Bank of Italy and finally Bank of America.

Lookout Avenue was paved only in the center strip and the town dog—yes, we had one, too—slumbered in the dust as solicitous shoppers carefully circled him. The old Opera House still stood at the corner of Palm Avenue; a respected citizen by the name of Ross still came to town driving his horse and buggy; and there were cows and sometimes other animals grazing along the railroad right-of-way. There was a railroad depot at "Lookout and Jump" and at times during the day a Diesel passenger coach stopped on its way to and from San Diego or Foster. In the mornings, Grossmont High School students clambered aboard, and on the train's return trip a cluster of La Mesa matrons was usually waiting for the thrilling ride to San Diego for a shopping spree.

Alongside the depot there was a drinking fountain, another across Lookout and still another in the Bank of La Mesa foyer, as well as several

others down Spring Street at Finley, Fresno and so forth. They were all supplied by water pumped from the then famed life-giving La Mesa Springs in a canyon near Collier Park. History says that long before the white man appeared, Indians came from afar for generations to drink the water that cured every ill. In our time, and of my own

knowledge, whites came from La Jolla, San Ysidro, Alpine and all points in between to fill their jugs, bottles and every sort of container, and many insisted on giving me earnest testimonials to the fact that they owed their health and in some cases their very lives to that wonderful water.

But you cannot stop progress. The day came when the local Irrigation District retained a bacteriologist to test the wonder water in a laboratory and he

declared that it had many undesirable bugs in it and the District's water from Cuyamaca Lake was much better. Of course, the water from Cuyamaca came through many miles of open redwood flume where cattle and wildlife drank from it, and many a squirrel, jack rabbit and field mouse and even some birds and occasionally a snake fell in and drowned while getting a drink. But a convenient fish net at the lower end of the flume easily



*La Mesans with train  
at "Lookout and Jump" in 1925.*

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La Mesa Historical Society**Officers and Directors**

(July 2002 - June 2003)

President*Gordon Jones*1st Vice President*Donna Niemeier*2nd Vice President • Docents and Tours*Carol Lockwood*3rd Vice President • Membership*Ruth Contino*Secretary*Sharon Crockett*Treasurer*Donna Niemeier*Past President*Karna Webster*Directors at Large*Leslie Tonkinson**Susan Mitchell**Norrie West**Ed Blackman**Kathy Tinsley*

## The President's Report

Over the past three years, it has been my privilege to serve as president of the La Mesa Historical Society, but due to health reasons I must retire on June 30, 2002 (the end of my current term of office). For this past year, I've had a great board of directors who have been a wonderful help and who have had many new and interesting ideas.

We published a new history, *La Mesa Through the Years*, a project spearheaded and mostly written by member **Norrie West**. The first edition sold out in a hurry, and we now have on hand a second edition for those of you who missed out on the first one.

**Donna Niemeier**, a former school principal, is currently rearranging our office space and organizing everything.

At long last, much needed painting of the McKinney House is underway. Volunteer professional painter **Bruce St. John** is doing the actual work on the house. The paint is being furnished by **Landmark Construction**.

Our first annual Easter Egg Hunt was held on the day before Easter. More than fifty children under eight years of age participated, including a few youngsters from the local homeless shelter. The Easter Bunny (**Dan Cancino**) arrived on a fire truck with **Kathy Tinsley**, who planned the whole event. She was assisted by **Gordon and Carol Jones**, **Donna Niemeier**, **Darby Michaels**, and a number of volunteers. A great time was had by all—including the firemen and three members of the La Mesa City Council.

*Karna Webster*

*Easter Bunny and Kathy Tinsley arriving at the Easter Egg Hunt on an antique fire truck.*

## La Mesa @ 90

Nearly one hundred LMHS members and descendants of La Mesa pioneer families crowded into Porter Hall on February 16th to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the city's incorporation in 1912. The program included a portrayal of a La



*President Karna Webster (center) presenting pioneer certificates to Jonathan Pearson and his daughter Judy Jo Beardslee.*

Mesa pioneer, Mary Fellows, by Jean Murton, and a CTN video of La Mesa complete with historic photos, antique cars, and scenes of the McKinney House Museum and LMHS activities. Karna Webster read an excerpt from a letter written by Roy Edwards in 1969 explaining why water from the springs in Collier Park no longer bubbled from local fountains.

Descendants of pioneer families were given special certificates. Then, everyone feasted on the cookies and anniversary cake. Many thanks to Donna Niemeier who put on the spread. She was assisted by Darby Michaels from the La Mesa Senior Center who volunteered to help. Historical photos were on display and enjoyed by all. Some then watched the video "The Winning of La Mesa" while others reminisced about the "good old days" with family and friends.

### The Incorporation of La Mesa

On February 7, 1912, local citizens, including many women, voted to incorporate La Mesa as a city. The vote was 249 for and 60 against incorporation. There had been a last minute

attempt to win votes to defeat incorporation.

On the evening before the election, a special meeting had been called at the La Mesa opera house. First Judge O'Neal, who apparently did not know the intent of the meeting, spoke about the many reasons for and against incorporation. Then, H.A. Marshall, who was bitterly against incorporation, spoke in opposition. According to the February 8, 1912 *San Diego Union*, he "monopolized the stage and began flaying everybody and everything in connection with the movement. Before he had finished talking, practically everyone in the hall arose and walked out."

Elected to run the city were: Trustees E.A.D. Reynolds, Dr. Charles Sampson, Dr. J.A. Parks, J.A. McRae, and S.R. Canon; City Clerk E.C. Upp, City Treasurer K.B. Finley, and City Marshall Frank M. Oliver.

### McKinney House Painting Underway

If you have driven by the McKinney House lately, you will have noticed Bruce St. John, an experienced professional painter, hard at work. He did all the preparation work and is brush painting the house without cost to the Society. In addition, he was able to have the paint donated by Landmark Construction Company. Many thanks to Bruce and Landmark!!

*Members of the Legacy Quilt Guild show the quilt they made for a drawing to be held at a special event by the LMHS on July 13th.*



*Mark your calendar so you'll be able to enjoy a fun-filled afternoon at the McKinney House. You'll be receiving an invitation soon.*

*Memories (continued from page 1)*

scooped out such things and the water was just as good as ever. So, a large red warning sign was installed at the famous La Mesa Springs and those waters were turned off forever.

It was in the spring of 1930 that the City offered me the job of City Engineer. I have never been so flattered in my life, and besides, the pay was \$50 per month! I jumped at the honor. A year later, the official resolution renewing my employment added the duties of Superintendent of Streets, Building Inspector, Electrical Inspector and Plumbing Inspector. Dog Catcher was not mentioned, but I was that, too. And, the pay was raised to \$75! However, it was really an easy job because now the city had become affluent and I had been assigned two city employees to assist me.

This was the period when the American Legion always sneaked up on Mt. Nebo early on the morning of 4th of July to set off a charge of dynamite, and an era when all the kids looked forward for weeks to Halloween. On that evening they soaped up a few windows in the fronts of the downtown stores and then waited for the police to "arrest" them and hustle them off to the City Hall where, from some mysterious source, tubs water and floating red apples and orange and licorice candies and other goodies appeared. If any youngster got missed, he phoned the police station and demanded to know why Bake (Homer Baker, a police officer) had passed him by, and then waited happily for the promised paddy wagon. A few of the luckier ones were escorted across the R.R. tracks and put behind the bars of La Mesa's lone jail cell for a few moments, and I fancy they still tell their kids and their grandchildren about that thrilling experience today.

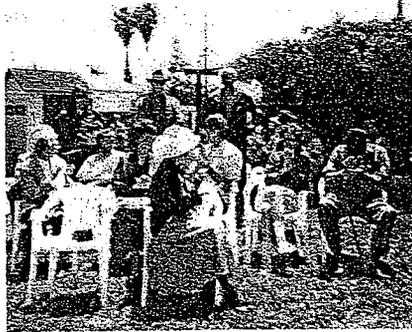
— by Roy Edwards

### *Recent Donations*

- *Two slate pencils - from the El Cajon Historical Society*
- *The 1917 volume of the La Mesa Scout newspaper - from members of the Alspaugh family*
- *Framed picture of George Washington - from the City of La Mesa*
- *Framed picture of Abraham Lincoln - from the City of La Mesa*
- *Large aerial photo of La Mesa - from the City of La Mesa*
- *Four Helix Theater seats - from the City of La Mesa*
- *Photo of the Lyster family, obituary of Ben Lyster, a La Mesa bus ticket, and a reproduction of a postcard showing the Park-Grable Building (at the corner of La Mesa Boulevard and Spring) - all donated by Dave Young, a grandson of Ben Lyster*
- *Copies of La Mesa School census and other documents - from Karna Webster*
- *Several La Mesa and La Mesa Colony maps - from Karna Webster*



Norrie West receives a Community Services Commission Award from Maria Graef with Carol Lockwood at left.



Members and guests gather in the yard of the McKinney House for the Rose Garden Celebration.



Cheryl and Richard Wilken



Mike, Quinn, and Mary Campbell

### Rose Garden Tea and Annual Meeting

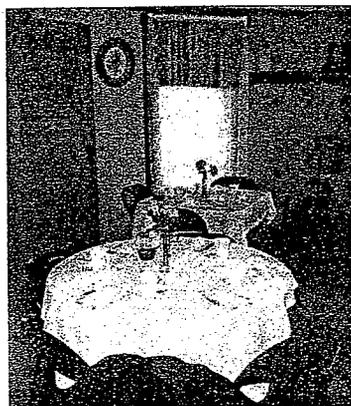
Beautiful weather prevailed for our May 11, 2002 rose garden event. Two names were added to the commemorative plaque in the LMHS rose garden: Joan Wilken and Sandy Campbell. Joan was honored as one of the founding members of the La Mesa Historical Society. She served as president (1977-1979) and was instrumental in preparing the proposal for the McKinney House HUD restoration grant that the Society received from the City. Sandy Campbell was remembered for her work with the

Quilters Group and for her help at many LMHS activities. Children of both women were present during the presentation.

LMHS President Karna Webster presided at the Annual Meeting as the new officers and board members-at-large were elected. Then, nearly 45 members and guests were treated to a grand English Tea which was planned and beautifully prepared by Donna Niemeier with the assistance of Sharon Crockett, Ruth Contino, and Amanda Bingham.



Amanda Bingham, Ruth Contino, and Donna Niemeier in the kitchen of the McKinney House.



The McKinney House dining room ready for the tea.



Linda McCarthy and Jan Covey — the clean-up crew.



P. O. Box 882, La Mesa, California 91944

# La Mesa Historical Society

Museum: Rev. Henry A. McKinney House (1908)  
8369 University Avenue

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
La Mesa, CA 91941  
Permit No. 208

Change Service Requested

SAVE SATURDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 13TH  
FOR A SPECIAL EVENT AT THE MCKINNEY HOUSE.  
YOU WILL RECEIVE AN INVITATION SOON!



The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 house-museum located at 8369 University Avenue (corner of Pine Street) in La Mesa. Open 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call 466-0197 for further information.

*Lookout Avenue* is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society  
P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 91944.

*Lookout Avenue* was the original name of La Mesa Boulevard. From the 1890's until the City Council voted to change the name in 1940, *Lookout Avenue* was La Mesa's main street.

*An Invitation to Join...*

## La Mesa Historical Society Membership

*The Society depends on membership dues, bequests and fund-raising activities to support the restoration and preservation of local history.*

- \$250 Benefactor
- \$125 Life (single)
- \$ 40 Patron
- \$ 25 Sponsor/Organization
- \$15 Family (2 adults)
- \$10 Individual
- \$ 1 Student (under 18 yrs.)
- I wish to become involved in the Society's work.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**La Mesa Historical Society, P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 91944**

*Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*