

La Mesa Historical Society

LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 37, Issue 3

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"Thoughts Historical"

History of Life and La Mesa

Aaron Landau, LMHS President

History is not a monolithic realm of study. It has its big picture and small snapshots. History employs a telescope as well as a microscope. In the macrocosm we have the history of life in its totality on this planet. In the microcosm we have the story of an individual. History has its broad-brush strokes as well as its pointillist dots.

Obviously, at the La Mesa Historical Society we are preserving a speck of an infinite canvas. We catalog and sustain the history of a ten square mile piece of the planet. We store photos and artifacts from a 100 year or so period of time out of the entire flow of recorded history. We reprise the lives and individuals and families that contributed to the making of La Mesa. We recount the events that stand out in our local history. The La Mesa Historical Society is a time capsule of a town that grew into a city. We are a repository of time and place.

Why are we so passionate and concerned regarding a time span of 100 years plus revolving around a ten square mile chunk of real estate? Local history incorporates the story of our lives and the lives of family and friends that have taken place within an incorporated city called La Mesa. We cherish the memories of our growing up here or coming here at a later stage in life. There is a feeling, a strong identification as with a "Home" sports team. A warm feeling of being at home.

As time goes by, we have our own 37 year recorded organizational history. A history of the local historians. You, our members, help sustain La Mesa's history. You allow us to preserve our city's past, celebrate its present during its centennial year, and propel us into La Mesa's second century.

"Lookout Avenue" continues its proud tradition. We have all back issues cataloged in our Palermo Archives Building. This edition is the premier issue for our new editor, Erin Ben-Judah. We want to thank Anthony Mc Ivor for his time, effort and inspiring writing in producing six issues of this publication. He is now archived. That is a historical compliment.

In the Spotlight

La Mesa Mayor Art Madrid

Mayor Art Madrid has lived in La Mesa since 1958. He raised his family here and is watching his grandkids play little league here. He has been a La Mesa resident for more than half of the time that La Mesa has been a city. The mayor states, "The day I finished high school we moved to San Diego, and I've been here ever since."

When asked what makes La Mesa such a great place to live, his response was overwhelmingly positive and quick. "First of all, we're a small city, and it's a village in every sense of the word, not just the downtown area. We have a number of residents that have been here many years and we have 2nd generation and 3rd generation residents living here. In my old neighborhood, all the sons

and daughters that grew up with my kids, have now purchased the homes from their parents and are living in the same place. And you find that kind of aspect a lot here. But I've always said, it's not the buildings or the environment, it's the people. And there's something unique about La Mesa residents. They're very open, they're very trusting, and they're very helpful."



It's fitting that a man who has lived here for 50 plus years is the mayor during the city's centennial celebration. Mayor Madrid has personally witnessed a great portion of La Mesa's history. The most significant change he has seen is, "the physical structure of the city, how we have grown. And yet, we've stayed the same community without compromising our values. We have protected those assets, and they're intangible in many instances. That distinguishes La Mesa from all the other communities."

He got involved in the community by first volunteering at his kids' high school. He was the first chair of the Helix High School Parent's Advisory board. "I'm a firm believer in getting involved in your community." This led to applying for a commission, and eventually to running for La Mesa's city council. The rest is history. Art Madrid first became La Mesa's mayor in 1990 and has won 5 elections since that time.

In planning for the centennial celebration, Mayor Madrid and numerous community members did a lot of preparation and research. It was important to make it a community event, to involve as many people as possible. The centennial has put the spotlight on La Mesa's rich history, while still looking toward the future. The mayor has this sentiment, "You know, one of the things that I've always said, before you look to the future, you have to look to the past. Then, you just continue to improve. You stay with the things that have made it a success, but you have to grow as well. You just can't stay static because you wind up not making it."

If you stop by City Hall, don't be surprised if you see the mayor out of his office. You will find him wearing jeans and a polo shirt talking to city hall employees. He refers to them on a first name basis. He feels like they are family. It's apparent in the manner in which he interacts with them. The atmosphere at city hall is informal. However, do not be fooled. City hall is a very productive and efficient operation, Mayor Madrid sees to that.

Fun facts about our mayor!

Favorite movie: either *A Few Good Men* or *An Officer and a Gentlemen*.
Favorite book: historical novels. *A Team of Rivals*, currently reading *A Scorpion Tongue*.
Favorite sport: I watch and play golf.

Beach or Mountains? Both.
Cold weather or hot weather? Cold.
Water or snow skiing? Probably snow skiing.
Scary movie or romantic comedy? Neither.
Chicken or beef? Chicken.
Car ride or plane ride? Plane ride.
Read or watch T.V.? Read.
Italian Food or Mexican food? Both.
Coffee or tea? Coffee.
Country or rock? Country.

A Special Welcome for the Society's New Members

Lisa Hamann



The Alphonse D. Fouchy house

7910 El Capitan Drive, La Mesa, built in 1931

Suzanne McHenry and Pat McHenry

The Alphonse D. Fouchy house is a remarkable example of Spanish Eclectic architecture rambling across two lots on the brow of El Capitan Drive looking out over a panoramic view to south, east and west. It is built of white stucco with red tile roof and specially designed window grilles. It is placed in the Spanish style near the street with many French doors opening the living areas to the privacy of the patio with its special oriental carpet style sheeting tile fountain.

7910 El Capitan was designed by master architect Alberto O. Treganza and built for $12,096.08 in the depths of the Great Depression in 1931 by acclaimed builder Edmund Dunn, who had moved to Lemon Grove from England. In those hard times both architect and builder were overjoyed to receive the commission. The house was constructed with infinite attention to detail within 3 months of completion of the plans.

The home was designed for a well-known doctor in the field of nervous disorders, Dr. Alphonse D. Fouchy. He was born in France in 1857 and became a naturalized American citizen in Oakland, California, in 1927. He was retired at the time he commissioned Treganza to design this house and he lived here for the remaining 6 years of his life before he died in 1937 at the age of 79.

The original plans for this 3 bedroom 2 bath house of 2900 square feet detailed one bedroom to be designated a large study with fireplace. The other bedroom and bath were planned for the maid. One large closet was used as a trunk room at a time when people traveled by train and ship. The current hobby room or art studio began as a workroom for a handyman or gardener.

There are beautiful and useful spaces filled with a richness of unusual details designed by the architect. Examples of the exceptional details include inscribed beams, built-in chests of drawers, angled and recessed windows, niches, benches, elaborate fireplaces, and a unique massive front door with Mexican silver hardware. The many steel-framed casement, multi-paned windows remain in working order including their surprising pull-down window screens.

One of Treganza's most amazing innovations was solar hot water. The north section of the roof still boasts a small tower which held the hot water tank and an adjacent slanting section which supported the solar collector. He was an inventor as well as architect and landscape architect; he even invented a machine for scaring off coyotes. With the help of Edmund Dunn he designed and built the Lemon Grove "lemon" for his daughter Amorita to ride in the 1928 Fourth of July parade. He painted water colors and was a noted ornithologist who had a species of heron named for him.

Great thanks go to the City of La Mesa and the La Mesa Historical Society for acknowledging the unique value of this property and encouraging the successful application for historical landmark status.

On Board

Ed Blackman



Ed Blackman has been a member of the La Mesa Historical Society since 1987. Ed and his wife, Beth, moved to the San Diego area in 1986 and their mutual love of historic houses brought them to the Historical Society. They attended the then-annual potluck and were hooked. Ed remarked, "Once you get involved, you never want to leave."

Ed and Beth both served on the Society's board on and off since they first joined. Ed has held every position on the board at one time or another, even serving one year as the Society's president in the early '90s. His most favorite responsibility at the Historical Society is the care and maintenance of the McKinney House Memorial Rose Garden. Ed was there when the idea of the rose garden first came to fruition. He served on the Society's landscape committee. They spent a lot of time researching the types of plants that would have been in the area circa 1900 – 1920. Everything around the McKinney house was placed there with a purpose: the roses were popular in San Diego around that period, and the banana trees were a luxury of the time, as were any plants from a foreign country.

The society has changed a lot since Ed first joined 25 years ago. He was in charge of memberships at a time before computers were common and records were kept on index cards by hand. The Society used to have the annual meeting in conjunction with a potluck, as well as an ice cream social every year. These things have given way to the annual Home Tours and the History round table meetings. Physically, Ed has watched the landscaping at the McKinney House literally grow up around him, developing from bare dirt into a manicured lawn complete with rose garden, lemon trees, and banana trees.

La Mesa is one of the few places in the San Diego area that still carries that small, hometown feel, and Ed would like to see that carried on for many generations. He would like the society to help to educate homeowners on ways to upgrade their historic homes without destroying the history thereof.

There are many places you may run into Ed, but one of those places is not inside. Ed loves the outdoors. He is an avid bike rider, riding 50-60 miles a week. He makes the trek from his home in La Mesa to places like Alpine and Jamul. When I spoke with Ed, he had been out that morning boogie boarding at Ocean Beach. He loves camping and hiking. Horticulture is what Ed is most passionate about. He is a big garden fanatic and loves to grow everything and anything. Ed says, "Everybody has a green thumb, there's something that everyone can grow, they just have to find the right thing."

Ed's daytime job is in Retail Pharmacy Management, a job he has been doing at one place or another for 44 years. Currently he works at Sharp-Rees Steely Pharmacy at Grossmont Medical Plaza. Ed is a 5th generation California native. His great, great grandfather on his dad's side was born in San Francisco and the family has been in California ever since.

A few things about Ed!

Favorite movie: *The Graduate*
Favorite sport: Nascar
Favorite book: Sunset Western Garden Book

Beach or mountains? Either
Scary movie or romantic comedy? Romantic Comedy every time
Country or rock music? Rock
Dogs or cats? Cats
Lake or ocean? Ocean
Chocolate or vanilla? Vanilla, or anything besides chocolate.
Car ride or plane ride? Car ride
Chinese food or Mexican food? Mexican food always.

About Town

Dr. Andrew G. Smith, Jr. Comes to Town

Andrew G. Smith, Ph.D.

My father grew up in small town in Illinois. He graduated from Kirksville College in Missouri and passed his state boards in osteopathy. His friend, Wally Swanson, was heading out West for a medical position. Wally planned to drive to Southern California along with his wife and baby son. Wally was headed to Chula Vista. As Dad was pondering his future (Illinois? Somewhere else?), Wally suggested that my dad might want to check out a little town called La Mesa in which to open a practice. My father was always curious about the Golden State. Wally invited my dad to ride along in their one small vehicle.

The trouble was that Dad would have to ride in the rumble seat. A small bench seat in the back part of the vehicle totally open to the elements. It was summer in the Midwest. My father would have to endure all that Mama Nature could throw at him—blazing sun, dust, wind, and rain. Dad "signed up" for this adventure.

Wally dropped dad off in La Mesa in 1927. Here was my father on his own in a new place. A stranger in a strange land.

Dad was able to rent office space on the second floor of the Park-Grable Investment Company building (built in 1908) on the north side of Lookout Avenue (La Mesa Boulevard) on the corner of Spring Street. He ate his three meals at Wells Café across from his office. Bill Wells steered ailing patrons to my father's osteopathic walk-up.

Dad couldn't afford a place to live. His office treatment table became his bed as well. Below his office was Clint McBride's barbershop. I screamed my way through my first haircut in this very shop barbershop as a fledgling. Clint figured out that dad was living in his office. "Doc, there's a shower in my restroom, and here's a key for you to use it." Young Doc Smith was certain that La Mesa was the right place to live and to practice medicine.

(To be continued)

Upcoming Events

Oktoberfest: October 5th, 6th, 7th

Silent Movie Night: Oct. 19th

Home Tour: November 3rd

Christmas Open House: Dec. 9th

Silent Movie Night

The Society's Flying A Silent Film Committee in partnership with the Theatre Organ Society of San Diego Presents A Night of La Mesa's Silent Film Legacy!

When: Friday, October 19th at 7:00pm
Where: Trinity Presbyterian Church
in Spring Valley.
Cost: $12 advanced sales, $15 at door
Featuring two "Flying A" reels and an Alan Dwan directed feature "A Modern Musketeer"!

7th Annual La Mesa Historic Home Tour

Saturday, November 3rd will see the 7th annual Historic Home Tour presented by the La Mesa Historical Society (LMHS), co-sponsored by the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of La Mesa.

The tour, which will highlight five La Mesa historic homes in or near the Date Avenue Historic District, will run 10 am to 3 pm.

Free shuttle buses will operate from the Tour Center at the northeast corner of Allison and Date Avenues, near City Hall, since there is limited parking and vehicle access for most of the homes. Abundant free parking is available adjacent to the Tour Center and in City lots.

Tickets purchased the day of the event will be $18 for members and $20 for non-members. Pre-sale tickets at $15 for members and $18 non-members are available by telephoning (619) 465-1883.

ArtiFACTS!



Waters' Concerto Parlor Organ

A visit to the front room of the McKinney House gets you up-close to one of the many interesting artifacts housed there. The McKinney organ sits in the corner of the front room, where it has been since the McKinney family moved into the house in 1901.They paid to have it shipped out from Illinois when the house was built. The organ most likely belonged to Florence McKinney prior to her marriage to Henry. The intricate wood moldings show the craftsmanship of that time.



Civil War Over Cityhood: Some in La Mesa Springs Fought Incorporation

James D. Newland

The San Diego Union headline of Dec. 2, 1911, said:

LA MESA RENT WITH STRIFE OVER QUESTION OF INCORPORATION
Decided Opposition Arises to Plans Which Heretofore Had Plain Sailing

Previously, all reports on the incorporation efforts in *The San Diego Union* and other local press indicated near unanimous support for the young town's municipal dreams.

Three weeks earlier, incorporation supporters led by the La Mesa Improvement Club's incorporation committee of banker Harry Park, engineer Dan Bissell and attorney Lester Welch gathered far more than the required 50 signatures, published their intentions in the Nov. 25, 1911, *San Diego Union* and planned to present their petition to the county Board of Supervisors on Dec. 6, 1911.

What the incorporation proponents and the local press had either underestimated—or not yet recognized—was a quickly organized and vigilant opposition.

Just a week earlier—on Nov. 24, 1911—this opposition had put together its own petition listing 66 names.

Most of those signing the opposition petition were landholders of larger "rural" properties outside the growing suburban tracts in the La Mesa Springs town.

Some of the most well-respected La Mesa residents had signed the opposition petition. Of note were Dr. Charles Samson and David M. Jones (both future mayors).

A Procedural Bump in the Incorporation Road

Just five days later, the two sides presented their cases to the county Board of Supervisors.

The *Union* reported that many La Mesa residents on both sides appeared before the board but that the incorporation petitioners held a large advantage, claiming at least 150 supporters to the opponents' 60.

Armed with the petitions and testimony, the Board of Supervisors referred the petition for incorporation to District Attorney H.C. Utley for review.

Utley rendered his opinion: the petition was legitimate and had the requisite number of registered voters, but incorporation supporters had failed to meet the requirement to have the "Notice of Application" published three consecutive times within a two-week period.

So the original petition would need to be refiled with the appropriate public notification completed prior to resubmittal.

If at First You Don't Succeed ...

Disappointed but not defeated, Park, Bissell and Welch quickly moved to correct their error.

They turned to their fellow petition signer, Wiley Magruder, the 21-year-old editor of the *La Mesa Scout*. Magruder obtained the formal public notice and published it in the Dec. 15, 22 and 29 editions of the *Scout*.

The La Mesa incorporation petition was now technically available to be presented to county supervisors. The incorporation committee wasted no time and filed the petition at the Jan. 2, 1912, board meeting. Armed with an "Affidavit of Publication," Lester Welch submitted an updated petition for incorporation to the supervisors.

At the Jan. 15, 1912, supervisors' meeting Lester Welch presented an incorporation map with adjusted boundaries on the west and northwest end of the proposed area.

The *Union* reported on the outcome of the Jan. 15, 1912, meeting that: "Strong opposition to the plan for incorporation was shown by a few citizens, but the majority of these were pacified by eliminating their property from the limits of the proposed town."

Considering the efforts to appease some of those concerned, the Board of Supervisors approved the petition and called for a special election to answer the question of La Mesa incorporation. The board set the date for Feb. 7, 1912.

Election Day: Feb. 7, 1912

The San Diego Union reported that "voting was lively at the polls in the morning with at least 180 votes being cast prior to noon and that "not a few women took interest in the election and did their share of the voting."

The final result: 249 votes for incorporation and 60 against.

First Gathering of the City Trustees: Feb. 14, 1912

The newly elected Board of Trustees and officers met on Wednesday, Feb. 14th.

In an action showing how the community had come together from the previously divisive months, the trustees elected from their ranks Dr. Charles Samson, the former incorporation opponent, as president (mayor) of the new City of La Mesa. Samson was elected with 3 votes to Solomon Canon's 2 votes.

La Mesa Birth Day: Feb. 16, 1912

Two days later, Secretary of State Jordan sent the following letter to San Diego County Clerk John T. Butler:

February 16, 1912

Dear Sir:
This will acknowledge receipt of a certified copy of minute order of the Board of Supervisors declaring result of the canvass and returns of the special election held at La Mesa February 7th, 1912. The document was filed today in this office.

A city was born.

This is an edited version of the 2nd of a three-part history of the City of La Mesa's Incorporation published in the La Mesa Patch webpaper. For the full article go to: http://lamesa.patch.com/articles/civil-war-over-cityhood-some-in-la-mesa-springs-fought-incorporation It is reprinted with permission.

Board of Directors

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Board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at 7:00 PM.

Share story ideas, comments and suggestions with Editor Erin Ben-Judah at erin.benjudah@hotmail.com

La Mesa Historical Society

McKinney House 1908

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Cut along line and mail the section below with your check.

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Membership Application

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

The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 house/museum located at 8369 University Avenue (at the corner of Pine Street) in La Mesa. Open 1-4pm every second and fourth Saturday of the month or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call (619) 466-0197 for further information. Lookout Avenue is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society. Our address is:

La Mesa Historical Society
P.O. Box 882
La Mesa, CA 91942

Lookout Avenue was the original name of La Mesa Boulevard from the 1890s until the city council voted to change the name in 1940. Lookout Avenue was La Mesa's main street.

- ☐ $250 Patron
- ☐ $100 Sponsor/Organization
- ☐ $50 Sustaining
- ☐ $20 Family
- ☐ $15 Individual
- ☐ $5 Student

Name: _____

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I would like to be a volunteer in the following areas:

- ☐ Docent/Education
- ☐ Events
- ☐ Grounds Building
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