INTERVIEW WITH PAT KETTLER - DECEMBER 3, 2024

Sharon: What was your early connection to La Mesa?

Pat: My parents and I moved to Lemon Grove in 1951 and I attended Grossmont High School and, in 1952, was a member of the first graduating class of Helix High School. After my husband graduated from San Diego State College in 1959, we purchased our first house in La Mesa on Normal Avenue, several blocks away from La Mesa Boulevard. I loved living near down town La Mesa and the library - and the movie theater. It truly felt like a welcoming place to live and raise a family. And I loved to walk around in the residential areas, especially Date Avenue, admiring the numerous old homes. So I became very interested in La Mesa's history and began to visit the library and learn about it. I also felt a need to become a part of the community so I became a member of the La Mesa Woman's Club Juniors which was located in its new building on Wilson Street, next door to the Lutheran church we attended and still do.

Sharon: How did the La Mesa Historical Society, which was incorporated in 1975, get started?

Pat: I did not attend the first community bi-centennial meeting that was held in 1975. According to Donna Regan, she and her mother, Dorothy Griner, did attend an early meeting after a group of La Mesans (including members of the Rev. McKinney family) had attended that City Hall meeting and then met the next day to discuss forming an historical society. Those people most involved with the planning were Helen "Woody" Linke, a La Mesa Realtor; Lloyd Donahoo, an early La Mesa resident; Bill Orsborn, a life-long resident of La Mesa; Jim Parker and Eric Sanders, La Mesa residents. They formally set up what became the La Mesa Historical Society in 1975. Lloyd was its first president, Bill Orsborn and Jim Parker its first VPs, Woody Linke, its first secretary; and Eric Sanders was given the task of incorporation. As a member of the La Mesa Juniors, I was asked to attend a LMHS meeting at the Rev. McKinney house. This happened shortly after the Society had been incorporated and the Rev. McKinney house had been purchased. **There was, at this time, an informally organized group of La Mesans who had lived in La Mesa as early as the turn of the last century. They called themselves the La Mesa Pioneers.

Sharon: How was the Rev. McKinney House obtained?

Pat: As I understand, realtor, Forest McKinley, was hired by the family of the Rev.Henry and Florence McKinney to sell their family house on the southeast corner of University Avenue and Pine Street. La Mesa realtor, Helen "Woody" Linke, who was active in the formation of the LMHS, heard about the house and contacted Mr. McKinley about purchasing it for the newly-formed Society. The two realtors met with the McKinney family and a deal was made for the purchase of the McKinney house for the Society. All this came together at about the same time the LMHS became incorporated, in 1975. The McKinney family had one request of the Society before the house was purchased - that Donald, the youngest of Rev. McKinney's three sons, be allowed to remain living in the house.

Sharon: Tell me about Donald.
Pat:

Donald had been living in the house most of his life, was a bachelor, and was now in his 60s? He was also somewhat mentally challenged, but capable of caring for himself, having lived alone in the house for a number of years after his parents had died (the Rev. died in 1930 and Florence died in 1956). The Society's representatives agreed to his family's request and when Society members started working on the interior of the house, several of its members (Dorothy Griner and ?) would check on him from time to time and helped to reassure him during this new development in his life. He was a very kind and friendly man - not easily upset by our comings and goings. He continued sleeping in his bedroom on the second floor, next to the bathroom, and going to and from his job each morning and evening, raising and lowering the American flag at the American Legion hall; I think that he ate most of meals there. I was told that during WW2 he was a cook in the U.S. Army. Sometimes, when I talked with Donald, I would ask him what it was like in La Mesa and what he did for entertainment as a boy. He told me how much he enjoyed the "walk abouts" that he took over the then-empty hillsides, a knapsack on his back, free as a bird in the open space that surrounded him, enjoying

the adventure of what he saw and found. He continued to live in the house for at least 8 or 9 more years?? until he became ill and his family placed him in a facility that could care for him, where he died at the age of 77.

Sharon: What was restored in the House and added on the property.

Pat: Donna Regan was in charge of much of the research and the restoration of both the interior rooms and furnishings, with the aid of several H.S. members, including myself. Of course, she took all of her recommendations, and the research info. to the board meetings for approval. And a timeline for the interpretation of the house and its furnishings was established for the years 1908 to the 1920s. Donna remained in contact with the McKinney family regarding questions about the house's furnishings, events there, and other things, which was much appreciated by her to better understand the family, house and its furnishings. For example, the dining room was the only room in the house that was wall-papered and learning what year the wallpaper was purchased made it easier to locate and find reproduction paper from the same year to replace the original dirty and faded paper. Some of the furniture in the house was from Rev. McKinney's furniture store in La Mesa. Donna was also in charge of having the removal of the front porch's 1922 second story addition and the restoration back to its original 1908 appearance. Several LMHS members and her very capable father, Lee Griner, also helped. In 1922, the original front porch roof was removed and repurposed as the roof for the kitchenette that had been constructed at the back of the house. I don't know the details about the moving of the garage which faced onto Pine Street and moved to the back of the lot in 197? and repurposed into LMHS's archives building. I do remember that I was attracted to it whenever I drove past Pine Street before there was a LMHS - It had a big smiley face painted across its front doors.

The archives building became the permanent home of the **La Mesa Scout** newspapers. The Palermo building was constructed in front of the new archives building and became the place where we then held our LMHS board meetings and where people could come on Saturdays to do research and choose photos from our growing collection and, later,

to view microfilms of the **La Mesa Scout** newspapers. Our wonderful Quilters moved their base of operation from the McKinney house to their roomier space in this new building and continued to make beautiful quilts. Pete Palermo, who lived across the street from the McKinney house, was a long-time resident of La Mesa. After his death, his wife, Thelma, donated the money to have this building constructed in his memory. A La Mesa Eagle Scout troop shingled the roof of the new building for their community service project, with professional supervision (one of the father's was an experienced roofer).

The LMHS received the donation of an 1890 4-hole outhouse from Spring Valley Historical Society in 1977. This outhouse had a long history on an old north Spring Valley lemon ranch/which became a turkey farm in the 1920s. The outhouse was placed about where the McKinneys had their 2-hole outhouse before indoor plumbing. Rurick Callas (sp.?), a member of Lemon Grove Historical Society, did the restoration work.

Sharon: Cleaning out of the McKinney House/ Preparing for tours
Pat: A number of Board and Society members helped clean and go through the house finding and recording the many McKinney artifacts we found. It was really an enjoyable and interesting job for all of us. In the kitchen there were many items, such as some very old spice tins and kitchen tools, which we used when setting up a display there. The old wooden drain board attached to the sink was in bad shape and needed to be replaced as the Society would be using the kitchen for events. I believe that it was Rurick Callas (sp?), who made the replication of the original board that is now in the kitchen. The pull chain toilet that is now in the bathroom was discovered on the back porch and was eventually cleaned, restored, and returned to its original place.

For many years the house welcomed groups of children from the local elementary and middle schools. I would take my history of La Mesa slide show to classrooms and then, at a later date, the teachers would bring the children to the McKinney House for a tour. We let them have an opportunity to experience the past by letting them run some socks

through an old washtub with a hand-ringer attached to it - with supervision, of course; It was set up next to the back porch. And twice a month the house was open for people to drop in for a tour. We would also schedule group tours.

Sharon: About Florence McKinney's the Parlor Organ

Pat: The organ that is located in the parlor was not there when the Society acquired the McKinney house. It was sold it to a La Mesa resident some time after Florence had died in 1956. The man who had bought it contacted the Society sometime in the 1970s, I believe, and offered to donate it to us. He had fully restored it and had kept it in his living room for many years. A granddaughter of the Rev. was married in the McKinney house parlor, some time in the 1980's I believe. I wonder if the organ was played for the event?

Sharon: Other events in and outside of the McKinney house.

Pat: The Christmas Open House. The house was festively decorated, upstairs and down, with greens and a decorated tree in the parlor and a dining room groaning with goodies - the kitchen was awash in donated cookies, etc., a silver tea set placed at each end of the table. The drawing was held on the front porch.

The yearly Ice Cream Social, which was held in June, had its beginning, thanks to the suggestion of several board members, one being Lloyd Donahoo, who may have been Society president at the time. The men on the board, husbands of women on the board, and others took on the task of setting up the back yard for BBQing chicken to serve along with the ice cream and other foods. A drawing was also held, usually for a quilt that our LMHS Quilters made. Sometimes the prize was an antique clock. A member of the Society, who was a clock collector and restorer, would donate a clock from time to time for the drawing. Prior to the event, members would set up a display in a La Mesa bank of the quilt or the clock to be raffled and sell drawing tickets to the public. Musicians would donate their time to perform under the big pine tree and artists would display their work for sale. That tree was planted in the 1920s by Donald. Donna and I would provide an historical display in the upstairs front bedroom and tours were given in the house. A lot of work, but such good fun and we always had a big crowd show up.

Sharon: When did you become aware of the existence of the old issues of the **La Mesa Scout** newspapers?

Pat: Around 1967 I had discovered that the La Mesa Scout newspaper office, which was located on the northwest corner of La Mesa Blvd. and Nebo Drive, across from the railroad tracks, had copies of their papers dating back to earlier times, on the premises. So I asked permission to go upstairs, where the old papers were stored, and read them and took copious notes (which I did for around a year). What I read and noted was so very interesting that I asked the WC Junior's president if we could raise money to have some of these old papers (dating from c.1918-c.1939) microfilmed. The Juniors decided to hold a book sale to raise money for this project. We also asked for donations from some of La Mesa's service clubs (Lions Club, Soroptimists for e.g.), and the La Mesa Thrift Store. So, some of the **Scouts** (which were kept together in book form, bound by the year - and in rather fragile condition) were microfilmed.

Sharon: How did the LMHS acquire these newspapers?

Pat:
During the time I was reading the old newspapers at the Scout office, the newspaper business was sold and the new owner moved the office east down La Mesa Blvd. and changed the paper's name to the **La Mesa Courier**. I asked the new owner if he would donate the papers to me to be stored and saved and he said that he would think about it. Several years passed, and I asked him again - I think it was about the time I became a LMHS member. He said yes, so I got busy collecting the papers from his office and stored them at my house for a time until eventually there was a place to store them in the McKinney House's new archives building (aka garage). I continued reading and writing down interesting facts about La Mesa on 3x5 cards and keeping them in a file box. From time to time I would write articles about what I found and place them in the Society's newsletter, the **Lookout Avenue.**

While the **Scout** newspapers were safely kept at my house, I spent many hours reading them and writing down the wonderful information I was learning about La Mesa's past - so many different things that I was excited to share with others. Its community celebrations - the Fourth of July, Easter, Clean Up Day, The Festival de las Flores parade and flower shows, school activities, etc. I became so inspired that I retired from the Juniors and became an active LMHS member. Over several years I read through 1916 to 1939 **Scouts.**

For several years, as a member, I would go to La Mesa service clubs, church groups, and other organizations with my slide show of La Mesa's history and hoped for donations to complete the microfilming and also have a set of microfilm copies made of the old **Scout** newspapers. Eventually this was accomplished and a microfilm copy was given to the the La Mesa library along with my file box of 3x5 cards which someone at the library typed (the cards were hand-written). When finished, they returned my original cards and file box.

Sharon: You were the society's first Photo Archivist.

Pat: The Society had been given quite a number of photos, including the ones I had the good fortune to find in my research days at the old **La Mesa Scout** office that were about to be thrown away! I offered to organize them and set up a filing system and a log using common sense, having had no training in this field. I had most of the photo copies of the collection placed in 3-ring binders, by category, and tried to put as much factual info. that I could find with each photocopy that was placed in protective sleeves. They lived in the Palermo building for many years for visitors to use. I also had photo negatives made of many of the photos we were receiving at that time. I had a number of photo copies enlarged on foam board for displaying at LMHS events at the house and at other events like Oktoberfest, the yearly membership meetings, and for customers.

Sharon: Oral Histories

Pat: I also had the opportunity to interview some of the early residents of La Mesa to glean and record some first-hand information about the community in its infancy. There were, in the late 1970s, a fair number of pioneers still alive to talk with me and others (Donna): For example, Marie McKinney, widow of Rev. and Florence's eldest son, Cromwell, and second son, Joyce; Olive Lott Mannen, Lloyd Donahoo, a Society board member who grew up in La Mesa in the late teens of the 20th Century; the mother of Bill and Jim Orsborn, whose family, the McCarthys, came to La Mesa, before incorporation in 1912, and opened the McCarthy Mercantile on Lookout Ave. and 3rd Street; Thelma Todd; Hubert Guy (grandson of Ernestine Schuman-Heink); Jean, his wife, was a LMHS board member for a time; Nan Couts, who came to La Mesa in the 1920s; Ed Fletcher, Jr. and his memories of Mt. Helix amphitheater and the cross. I didn't record all of those I wanted to - time got away from me, I guess.

Sharon: The LMHS held a Membership Meeting once a year and other events.

Pat: LMHS yearly membership meetings were usually held in different historic buildings each year, e.g. the Central Congregational Church on Lemon Ave., the Methodist Church on Palm Ave., the Masonic Lodge, American Legion Hall, Anthony's Fish Grotto, Porter Hall and were well attended events. Donna Regan, her mother, Dorothy Griner and I (others??) would put together displays with photos, clothing items, and interesting artifacts from the McKinney house. The board usually hired a caterer for these events and usually had a guest speaker. In later years this event was held outside, in the back yard of the McKinney house in connection with the Memorial Rose Garden event. The Rose Garden came into being when the board voted to raise money for the Society by asking its members and friends to donate money to plant a rose bush to honor a family member, a La Mesa pioneer, or someone in the Society. A plack was constructed on which the names of those honored were displayed and it was placed in the rose garden which ran along the fence line on the east side of the house.

Sharon: Were you involved in the writing any of the Society's historical publications about La Mesa?

Pat: There were two publications and a brochure that I was involved with, along with several others. The first was the La Mesa history unit put together by staff members at

La Mesa Junior High School in 1984. I was asked to provide photos, text and historical information. In 1987, the City of La Mesa provided the funds for the Society to put together a rather large foldout brochure which included 16 historical photos dating from 1897 to the early 1960s with text, and a brief history of La Mesa. I worked on this project with Donna (not sure if there was anyone else). In 2000, Norrie West, the author who compiled **La Mesa Through the Years**, asked several LMHS members to help with the research, select photos, write some of the text, and proof read. I believe Karna Webster, Carol Lockwood, and I made up this group assisting Norrie. When Gordon Jones authored **Historic La Mesa: A downtown made for walking** in 2003, he asked me to select photos for the book and provide historical information.

Sharon: How long were you active in the LMHS?

Pat: After my husband's death in March of 2008, I was active with the photo collection, getting photo copies made for customers and, for a time, I also clipped information about La Mesa from the newspapers for the Society's file. Around 2009 I decided to retire myself, but I keep myself aware of the good work that the La Mesa History Center is doing.