



La Mesa Historical Society LOOKOUT AVENUE



Volume 20, Number 3

Winter 1999

Special points of interest:

- Christmas Open House
Sat. Dec. 11, 1 to 4 PM
- Carlota McCutchen
Alexander: Early La Mesa
Teacher
- Mt. Helix Nature Theater
& Sean Carroll
- 25 Years of LMHS

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--|---|
| President's Corner | 2 |
| New Members | 2 |
| Donations | 2 |
| Death of Early La Mesa Teacher | 3 |
| Mt. Helix Nature Theater & Sean Carroll | 5 |
| La Mesa Historical Society - 25 Years | 6 |
| Membership Invitation | 7 |

Christmas Open House Sat. December 11, 1 to 4 PM

Come and join in the holiday festivities at our historic McKinney House, 8369 University Avenue on Saturday, December 11 from 1 to 4 PM. The house will feature traditional Christmas decorations created for the occasion. Sing along as Elizabeth Montgomery plays Christmas carols on the McKinney organ, accompanied by a guest flutist as an additional musical treat. Taste the fabulous scones baked in the McKinney kitchen by our talented cook, Marilyn Webb. Cookies and other refreshments will be served as well. Exhibits at the house and in the Thelma Palermo Building include Wedding Gowns from 1879 to 1918; a display of La Mesa's mayors from 1912 to the present; highlights of La Mesa's growth from 1912 to the present; and the restoration of the children's bedroom. There is no charge for this open house.

Prizes this year will include:

- An heirloom Mission-style wall clock c. 1910
- A beautiful holiday floral arrangement from La Mesa Florists
- Family Tree Maker (genealogy software for a PC)



Maria Bogardus Zipf, 1892 - gown on display

- Dinner for two at Mario's Mexican Restaurant - La Mesa

The drawing for the prizes will be held at 3:30 PM. Bring your friends - everyone is welcome. Hope to see you there!

Anyone who would like to help clean and decorate the house, help guide visitors or serve refreshments during the Open House can contact Karna Webster at 463-1029.

President's Corner



"LMHS & McKinney House Museum will celebrate 25th anniversary in October 2000"

Someone told me that as you grow older the years pass by more quickly. It's true! They seem to go by faster and faster. It's hard to believe that the LMHS and the McKinney House Museum will celebrate their 25th anniversary in October of 2000!! In looking forward to this anniversary, some ideas of ways to celebrate have come to my attention. It would be fun to recognize the pioneer families of La Mesa in some special way. Maybe we could also put together a time capsule to be opened on the 100th anniversary of the LMHS, or maybe in the year 2100? What would we put in the capsule? Put on your thinking caps and let me know.

Everyone is looking forward with excitement to the New Year and wondering what opportunities it will bring for our society. I will look forward to seeing you at our *Christmas Open House, December 11, 1999*, and would love to hear your ideas.

I would like to take the opportunity of extending a very special thank you to LMHS members, Jennifer and Barry Kramer, who are the editors of our newsletter *Lookout Avenue*. (Incidentally, until 1940, Lookout Avenue was the original name of La Mesa Blvd.)

Karna Webster

Donations



Elizabeth Chapin Porter, 1879 gown on display

Estelle Sommerville – Black and white postcard of the Carrie Jacobs Bond house on Grossmont.

Karna Webster – Black and white snapshots of the Fellows' Cypress Hotel (1870s), which stood, near the northeast corner of University Ave. and La Mesa Blvd.

Steve Saint – Complete 10-year set of the La Mesa Forum newspapers (1989-1999).

Earl Saunders – Commemorative booklets from La Mesa First Methodist Church.

New Members

- | | |
|---|--------|
| Jocelyn and David Zimmerman | Family |
| Evangeline Homer | Life |
| Newton Homer | Life |
| Clarence and Marion Gerber | Family |
| Suzanne Trelease | Life |
| • (Suzanne Trelease upgrade from Individual membership) | |

Coming in the Next Issue of *Lookout Avenue*:

Who were the McKinneys?

Collecting the History of Old Home In Our Neighborhoods - The Bruce Carmichael House (Mt. Helix area)

The Death of an Early La Mesa Teacher

Carlota McCutchen Alexander 1906-1999

Carlota McCutchen was born in San Diego. In 1913 at age seven, her family moved to La Mesa and purchased a house on Lemon Avenue (Mt. Nebo area). She attended the "old" Allison School (1st through 8th grades) and then the "new" La Mesa Grammar School, which had been completed in 1914. In later years she returned to the same site as a teacher.

The Allison School (built in 1896) was torn down following completion of the La Mesa Grammar School. Most of the Grammar School was torn down in the 1980s to make way for a development project that includes the La Mesa senior high rise, most of the La Mesa Springs shopping center and the La Mesa Spring Valley School District offices on Palm Avenue. A portion of the Grammar School still exists on Orange Avenue and is used in connection with senior activities.

In 1920, Carlota and her family moved back to San Diego where she attended San Diego High School. She then attended the University of Redlands, graduating in 1928 with a teaching degree. Her first teaching assignment was at La Mesa Elementary School where she taught 3rd Grade until 1943. For the next 25 years, Carlota worked in Christian education at several church-sponsored schools. In 1980 she

moved permanently to Carmel where she died on July 12, 1999 at the age of 93.

The following is a brief look at what was expected of a teacher in the 1920s and 1930s – an interesting comparison to today. This information consists of Mrs. Alexander's remembrances, gleaned through a correspondence with her that spanned several years.

Carlota Alexander began teaching at LME in 1928, the year preceding the beginning of the "Great Depression" in America. The period of time she most talked about were the years between 1928 and 1939. In those years, it was common to have 50 children in one classroom with one teacher and no helpers. Moreover, there wasn't enough money to raise salaries or hire additional teachers. Duties of an LME teacher included yard duty, either before or after school, at noon and at recess. After-school yard duty lasted until 4PM, when the last school bus left with the Spring Valley children. At noon, yard duty teachers had to also find time to eat and get ready for afternoon classes.

Some teachers received an additional \$25 a year for taking the leadership of an after school Brownie Troop. There was no pa-

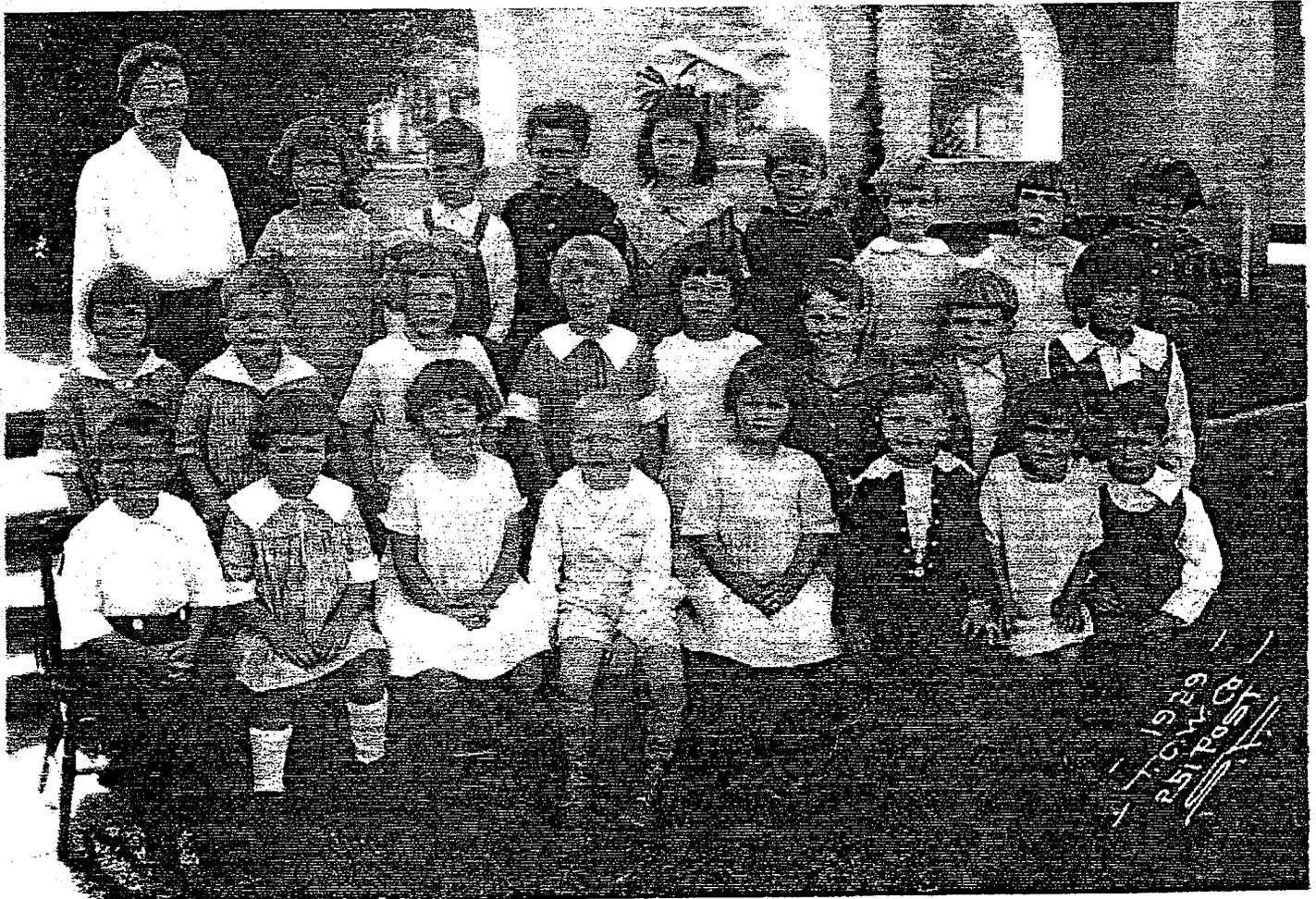


Carlota McCutchen Alexander – c. 1934
Dressed for a costume party (Seated)

rental or other help in the classroom and teachers were expected to attend all PTA meetings. Teachers always took work home at night and had to do their own duplicating. Carlota said that she remembered going to the drug store to buy sheets of gelatin to melt and pour onto cookie sheets to use for duplicating. (Unfortunately, she didn't explain the details of the procedure.)

One of Mrs. Alexander's most famous 3rd grade students was Bill Anders, who went on to become an astronaut on Apollo 8.

Note: The LMHS has an extensive collection of photos from this time period and La Mesa Elementary School was a very active school with an orchestra, baseball and football teams, and other school programs. These were very busy teachers!



La Mesa Grammar School class c. 1929

The Mt. Helix Nature Theater and Sean Carroll

Since 1989 when the controversy began over the Mt. Helix cross, the La Mesa Historical Society has, from time to time, presented historical information to our members about this special place in our East County. Ten years have passed since the state court became involved in the debate surrounding Mt. Helix and, finally, the controversy seems over. A San Diego federal judge made the final ruling that the County of San Diego cannot maintain the cross, and it also cannot violate the terms of the 1929 trust which instructed that the cross be maintained with funds provided by the family who donated the park to the county.

The County Board of Supervisors, the plaintiffs and the judge have agreed that the park shall be maintained intact, which includes the cross and the land upon which it stands. The Foundation For The Preservation of The Mt. Helix Nature Theater will act as successor Trustee for the nature park and amphitheater. For more information on the foundation write: Mt Helix Foundation, P.O. Box 2733, La Mesa, CA 91943.

One person who contributed so much toward public awareness of the history of the Mt. Helix Nature Theater and the cross was Sean Carroll. In May of 1990 the Society wrote an article about the then 12-year-old, 7th grade student at Emerald Jr. High

and his school history project. His report, *Mt. Helix Nature Theater – A Gift To Us All*, garnered him a grand prize at the SDSU-supported San Diego County History Fair, and would later be instrumental in the designation of the Nature Theater as a county historic site. In 1989, Sean presented his report to the County Historic Sites Board, the Planning Commission, then to the County Board of Supervisors, all of who were impressed with his report. A Sites Board staff member said, "His presentation puts to shame many of the professional nominations we've had to deal with." A copy of Sean's report was presented to the La Mesa Historical Society and has been placed in its research library. The complete report includes copies of all the supporting documentation: articles, letters and photographs.

Sean is now 23 years old and we thought you would like to know what has happened to him in the past 10 years. Sean attended Valhalla High School and in his senior year became class president. Upon graduation in 1994, he became a student at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on a full ROTC Scholarship. He graduated in 1998 with a degree in history. In August of 1998, Sean was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. and is presently stationed in Hawaii.



Sean Carroll c. 1989



Sean Carroll – 2nd Lieutenant

La Mesa Historical Society - 25 Years

Early in 1975 when America was preparing to celebrate 200 years as a nation, La Mesa was in the process of forming its own historical society to help in the celebration. Photographs, memorabilia and artifacts began to be collected. There was a desire to put down in writing the details of our community's history so that it would not be lost in time. Thus, the purpose of the La Mesa Historical Society began to be realized under the leadership of its first president, Lloyd Donahoo and many others. Shortly thereafter, an opportunity arose that made it possible for the newly-formed LMHS to purchase its own headquarters and a museum for La Mesa.

In the spring of 1975, La-Mesa realtor, Helen "Woody" Linke, was showing a prospective buyer an old house that had been recently sold by a La Mesa family who had built and owned it since 1908. It struck Woody that this would be a perfect community museum and headquarters for the recently-formed La Mesa Historical Society. The McKinney family, the original owners of the house, was very responsive to her thoughts about the museum idea, as was the real estate broker, Forest McKinley, who had bought the house from the McKinneys. Marie McKinney (widow of the Reverend's eldest son, Cromwell), Joyce McKinney (2nd son) and Donald McKinney (the youngest son), were gracious in their financial assistance and with the purchasing terms. In the fall of 1975, the LMHS became the owner of their own headquarters and the house museum of La Mesa's history - LMHS and the bank, that is.

The next few years kept Society members busy cleaning, recording and researching the contents of the house. It was truly a unique experience to clean out drawers and hiding places and find documents and artifacts of a family who had lived in the same house for nearly 70 years! It was unusual and fortuitous to find the kitchen unaltered and basically looking as it did when the house was built in 1908.

In February of 1979, the LMHS submitted a request to the La Mesa City Council for \$25,000 in Community Block Grant funds. This request for funds was for some major restoration work on the exterior and interior of the McKinney House. The City granted funds for the project, and a contract was

signed in October to complete all planned work by February of 1981. Money from the grant was used to relocate the 1932 garage from Pine Street to the back of the property, restore the front of the house to its 1908 appearance, re-roof the house, restore interior woodwork, repair plaster ceilings and walls, refinish oak floors, update plumbing and electrical wiring and other lesser projects.

In February of 1980, the Society retained a general contractor for some of the major projects, but Society volunteers and friends completed a good deal of work. The contractor removed the altered front porch and the second-story screened porch that had been added in 1922, and reconstructed an exact replica of the original front porch. This restoration was necessary because the 1922 addition gave the house a boxy look that destroyed the original architectural appearance of the house.

In 1985, the Rev. Henry McKinney House became the property of the LMHS, free and clear through the generosity of the McKinney family. In October 1985 the house became Landmark Number 1 in the City of La Mesa - "a well-preserved example of a turn-of-the-century Homestead House." In 1995, plans were completed in the restoration of the upstairs bathroom. The grounds were landscaped, an automatic watering system was installed and a heritage rose garden planted. Presently, work is in progress in the upstairs children's bedroom. Much still needs to be done to the walls and floor.

Over the years the McKinney House has become a storehouse for La Mesa's history.

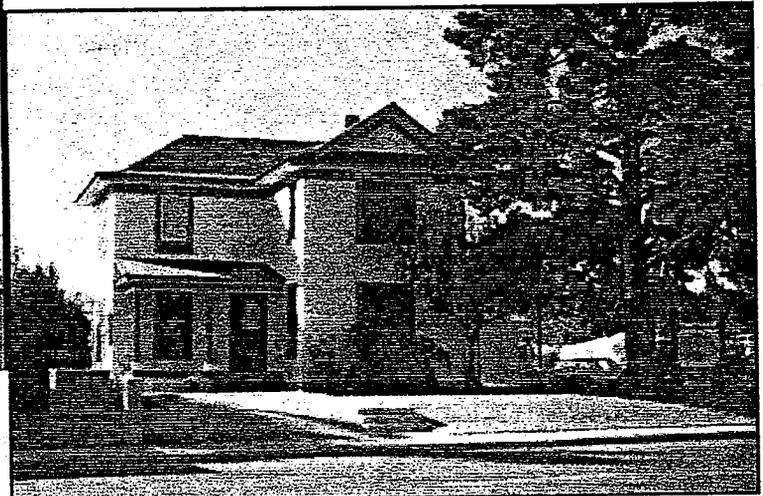
The La Mesa Historical Society has kept the house open to the public on Saturdays as a free museum and has conducted tours for thousands of school children as well as adult groups. As owner of the McKinney House, the LMHS has the sole responsibility of maintaining and operating the house museum and caring for the artifacts, photographs and other historically significant items. Funds are raised through membership dues, fundrais-

ers, bequests and memorials, and donations. The Board of Directors sends a big thank you to everyone who has so generously donated their time, talents and money in support of our efforts. We hope you will encourage your friends and families to also become members of the La Mesa Historical Society.

Pat Kettler



McKinney House at the time of purchase - c. 1976



McKinney House after restoration - c. 1985

MEMBERSHIP IN LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

An Invitation to Join

The Society depends upon membership dues, bequests and fund raising activities to support restoration and preservation of local history. *Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.* Membership categories include:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ___ Benefactor..... \$250 | ___ Sponsor/Organization.....\$ 25 | ___ Student (under 18 yrs.).....\$ 1 |
| ___ Life (Single)..... \$125 | ___ Family (2 adults).....\$ 15 | |
| ___ Patron..... \$ 40 | ___ Individual..... \$ 10 | |

To join the La Mesa Historical Society, please complete and return this form with your check to :
LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 882, LA MESA, CA 91944.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

 * I would like to become *
 * involved in the *
 * Society's work. *



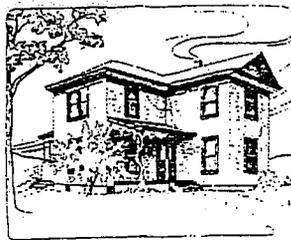
P. O. Box 882, La Mesa, California 91944

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



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. Hours are 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday afternoon or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call 466-0197 for further information.

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

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.