

INTERVIEW WITH PAT KETTLER ON 3 DEC 2024
(RECORDER MALFUNCTIONED)

Sharon: I'd like to focus the interview on how the La Mesa Historical Society got started – I now it was incorporated in 1975, but it must have met prior to that. I think you were one of the original members.

Pat: Donna Regan was actually active prior to me. There was an advertisement in the paper about establishing a Historical Society because of the Bicentennial. I think it met at the Rec Center. I didn't attend the first meetings

The house was bought in 1975. A lot of the effort was done by the Pioneers of La Mesa Roy Donahue, Woody Linch (a realtor), Joseph and Marie Guy (relatives of Madame Schumann-Heink). Pat came in shortly after the 1st meeting...it was at a restaurant that was next to Drew Ford – this was by the freeway before there was an off-ramp there.

The La Mesa Jr's sent me to a meeting to see what it was all about and how they could help. I got so interested in the La Mesa Historical Society that I switched from the Junior's to the Society. The Jr's had a book sale in the Heller Building (see book on location) to raise funds to get the Scout microfilmed.

In '64, I used to go to the La Mesa Scout...I'd take my son and a play pen and read the papers.

Sharon: Are the Jr's associated with the women's club?

Pat: You can be in the Junior's until you were 35 and then you went to be part of the Women's Club.

When I was part of the LMHS, we'd speak at the Lion's Club and other places to raise money to microfiche the Scout newspapers. The La Mesa Thrift Store also donated.

Sharon: How did the La Mesa Historical Society obtain the McKinney House?

Pat: Woody Link spoke to McKinley. He was willing to sell the house. The LMHS had some money and the McKinney family loaned the Society the balance of the purchase – like a second on the house. The stipulation was that the son, Donald needed to stay in the house. He was mildly mentally challenged...not bad because he served in the Army. I think as a cook. When he needed to be moved to a Residential Facility, the family cancelled the not.

Sharon: That must have been interesting sharing the house with Donal.

Pat: We meet in each others homes. Thelma Todd was a pioneer – we occasionally met in her home. Occasionally we'd meet in the McKinney house.

Sharon: Didn't the quilters also meet at the house?

Pat The quilters met in what is not the exhibit room (was the researchers room) until the Palermo building was built.

Sharon: If the LMHS was incorporated in 1975, were you actively engaged then?

Pat: I think it was closer to 1976. (she consulted a 1974 membership directory

Sharon: Back to the Scout – you were very involved in obtaining the copies.

Pat: I went to the person who bought the Scout to get them donated to the LMHS. The 1916/17 copies went to Gene Guy who was documenting the Schumann-Heink house. I think we have a few of them for the LMHS.

Since they didn't have room for them, I had them stored downstairs (much to my husband's chagrin). I would spend hours reading them and typing up cards of information. I keep learning so much. This started my involvement in contributing to the Lookout.

The Archives were in the old garage. The garage was moved back to the current position to accommodate the Palermo building. It used to be closer to the street – the garage door was wooden double opening and had a smiley face painted on it.

I also starting taking care of the photo collections and categorizing them. "P" for photo + "N" for negative plus the date and lineage (EG: i, 2 3,...). I think they still use that today. I didn't have any training on this, but it seemed logical.

The scout office also had a big box. That I asked to look in. It was full of photos. I spent a lot of time investigating those photos. I didn't want to be presumptuous and ask for the whole box, so I would take some here and there. The Pioneers would bring in their photos to correspond with articles being written and would leave them after the articles were done. I really want to take the whole box, but thought that was too much to ask. When I finally went back and asked for it, they said they had tossed it all. I wish I had not been so timid.

Sharon: You had a huge impact on getting the photo collection amassed. How did this start?

Pat: The La Mesa Yesterday and Today book piqued my curiosity. Plus, people would loan their photographs and I would take them to the camera shop in downtown La Mes (address) to have them photo copied.

Sharon: You were also heavily engaged in the book LM Today and Yesterday.

Pat: Norm wanted to do it.

Sharon: What kind of activities did the LMHS used to do.

Pat: We did Ice Cream Socials. The men would BBQ chicken in the backyard and people would bring food...of course ice cream.

Artists would show paintings, we had house tours for the community, we'd sit under the old arbor (which had wisteria on it) as late as 1986. Membership meetings were at the Rec Center and other places...Anthonies, and the restaurant near Drew Ford.

Sharon: You started the oral history program. I heard the interview you did with Nan Coutts.

Pat: I did Nan Coutts. I also interviewed Ed Fletcher, JR regarding the building of the Amphitheater.

Sharon: Was GMIA around then?

Pat: I think so. Donna researched items for the house. She was able to replicate the wallpaper in the dining room, and the sponge work on the walls in the bedroom upstairs. She was also very engaged in the tearing off of the old porch. She tried to do things historically correct. To do this, there was an opportunity to speak to the McKinney's about colors, memories, etc.

Donald would remain in the house. He was a bit child like and Donna's mother would help with him. Chocolate Bells came up...are they still in La Mesa?

When we were cleaning out the house... there was a lot left, we'd find interesting things. The old kitchen wooden drain board was left and we were able to reconstruct it.

Sharon: Did you write the nomination package for the house?

Pat: Donna did it. She worked with a USD professor and students. We had meetings at Thelma Todd's house to nominate the house. The professor actually wrote the nomination package and we edited it and added photos and captions.

Sharon: I think you Donna and Karna were really instrumental in establishing the LMHS.

Pat: Donna was first then me. Karna started with the Spring Valley Historical Society and then joined us.

Sharon: How was the house used?

Pat: We put on displays upstairs in the front bedroom and then in Donald's bedroom. The downstairs room was for research.

Sharon: How was maintenance done on the house?

Pat: The men took care of it. On the inside, Donna was particular about the furnishings and type of wax used.

In the 70's, Donna kept reminding them of the mission to maintain the house historically correct.

Sharon: What timeframe was used as the benchmark?

Pat: Donna was firm on the timeframe. (what was it?) The pioneers were still alive and knew where house objects went to. Things like the old pine tree...the exterior paint color was lighter

Sharon: How long were you active in the LMHS?

Pat: I was active until 2008...when my husband died.. After that, I didn't have time.

Other things...the outhouse was moved from Southbay (Karna found it).

Into the 1990's the LMHS got smaller and smaller as older people passed....it was really Donna, Karna and myself.

Sharon: Any other recollections of the house?

Pat: The lower room next to the kitchen was rented out in the WWII era. The bathtub was repainted in the early 90's. Donna spoke to Marie McKinney, daughter of the Reverend and a lot to get detail on the house

Sharon: What was your early connection to La Mesa?

Pat: In 1947, we moved from Minnesota to La Habra. In 1951, I moved to San Diego - Grossmont area. Other recollections include a Piggly Wiggly next to the old Lamb building that burned down.