



La Mesa Historical Society

LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 22, Number 2

Autumn 2001

La Mesa Historical Society Publishes A New History of La Mesa

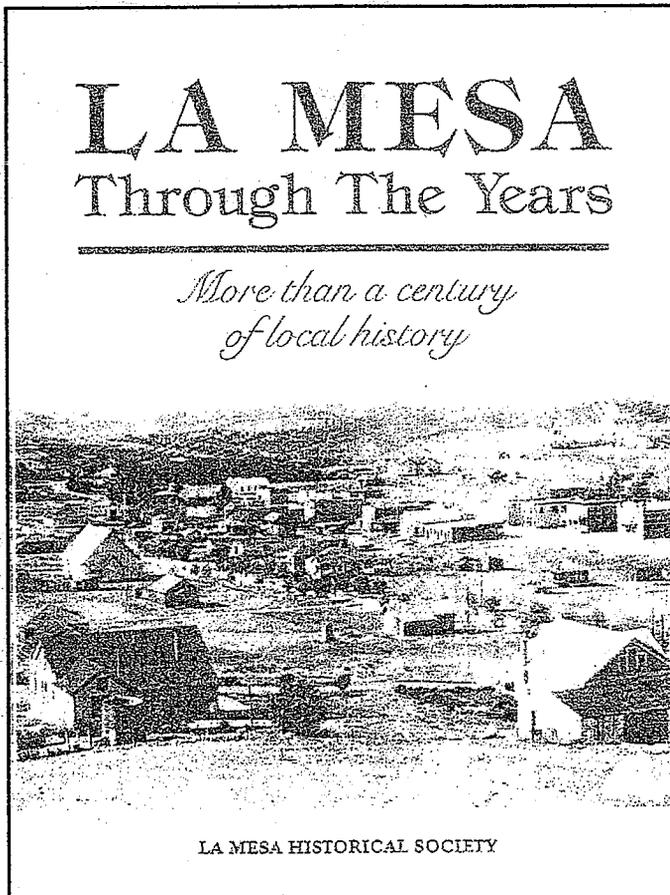
After more than eight months of intensive effort, the La Mesa Historical Society has published a new book about the history of our city titled *La Mesa-Through the Years*.

Beginning this past November, LMHS board member Norrie West worked almost non-stop at gathering photographs and doing interviews of La Mesa's citizens, old-timers, and the city's movers and shakers. Norrie also wrote most of the book with some parts contributed by Carol Lockwood, Karna Webster, and Pat Kettler. Linda Michael did the typing, layout and a good deal of editing.

Norrie also raised more than \$5,000 needed for the cost of printing one thousand copies. Generous financial contributions were made by the City of La Mesa, as well as Councilman Dave Allan, Andy and Lloyd Kitzman, Ed and Sandy Burr (EDCO), and Joe Drew (Drew Ford). We are ever so grateful for their support.

La Mesa-Through the Years begins with the

arrival of Robert Allison in 1869 and chronicles La Mesa's growth through the years to the present. In its text and pictures, it tells how the city came to be what it is today.



In the first chapter, Pat Kettler presents a brief history of La Mesa accompanied by 35 fascinating historical photographs from the historical society's collection. (The 233-page book includes 80 pages of photographs.)

Then, Norrie writes about the mayors and other civic leaders. And, Carol Lockwood contributes a chapter about Grossmont - the mountain, the high school, the hospital, and the shopping center. Karna Webster writes about one of her most favorite subjects, historic houses. There are also stories and pictures of La Mesa's movie-making legacy; the great waterway called "the flume"; our

schools; our pioneer families; our historic businesses; parks; and much, much more.

La Mesa-Through the Years is now available

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The President's Report

So far, the year 2001 has been an exciting and busy year for the La Mesa Historical Society board and members. In February, **Bruce Semelsberger** from the San Diego Railroad Museum told us about the San Diego & Cuyamaca Railroad, built through La Mesa in the 1890s. Despite a rainstorm and the leaking roof at Porter Hall, we enjoyed the excellent talk and the exhibits. Bruce wore a train conductor's uniform. Then in April, we held our annual rummage sale. The day started out with a drizzle, but by 11 a.m. we had to pack everything away because of the rain and cold wind.

Annual Meeting

The sun came out for our Annual Meeting at the end of April. **Al Johnstone** told us the history of Mt. Helix and the Nature Theatre and the exciting plans underway for the theatre facility and surrounding land. (Al Johnstone and his wife, Nancy, are currently building the revolving house near the top of Mt. Helix.) We elected our new board, but since then, **Donna Niemeier**, a newly elected board member, offered to serve as Treasurer; she was appointed by the board to the position. This was a great help to me. In addition, Pat Kettler resigned as Secretary and **Leslie Tonkinson** was appointed to fill the vacancy.

Ice Cream Social

We held our annual Ice Cream Social in June. The day was on the cool side so we didn't sell any lemonade. Many LMHS
(continued on page 8)

CALENDAR

December 8 - Saturday
*Christmas Open House
at the McKinney House*

February 16 - Saturday
*Program to Celebrate
La Mesa's 90th Birthday*

April 28 - Sunday
*Annual Meeting & Luncheon
at the Brigantine Restaurant*

May 19 - Sunday
Rose Garden Celebration

June 22 - Saturday
*Ice Cream Social
at the McKinney House*

LMHS Officers and Directors 2001-2002

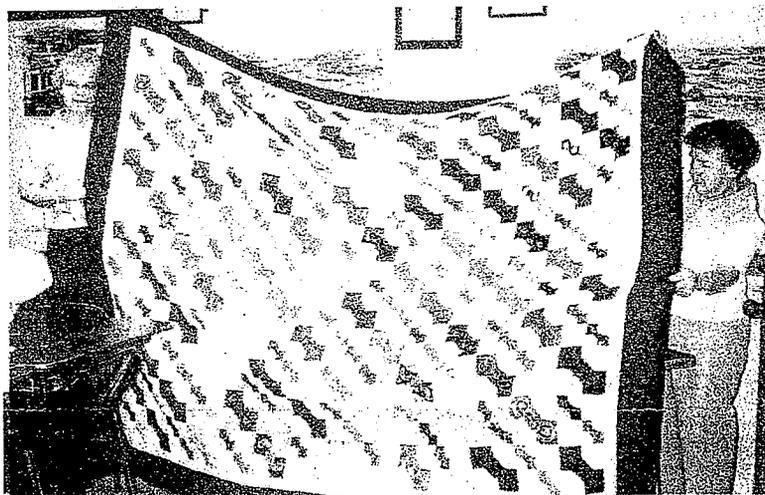
- President: Karna Webster
- 1st Vice Pres: Carol Lockwood
- 2nd Vice Pres: Ed Blackman
- 3rd Vice Pres: Norrie West
- Secretary: Leslie Tonkinson
- Treasurer: Donna Niemeier
- Past President: Donna Regan
- Directors at Large:
 - Gordon Jones
 - Susan Mitchell
 - Ruth Contino
 - Sharon Crockett



*France Dodson, Kathy Tinsley, and Jonathan Pearson
enjoy the sweet treats served at the Ice Cream Social.*

The Legacy Quilt Guild

For the past two years, the Legacy Quilt Guild has provided the beautiful hand-made quilts for the drawing at the La Mesa Historical Society's Annual Ice Cream Social. This philanthropic guild, which was founded in 1986, is also busy during the year making smaller lap robes for the San Diego Burn Center. The Board of the LMHS extends its gratitude to the ladies of the Legacy Quilt Guild who have given so generously of their time and talents to provide the heirloom-class, hand-made quilts for our drawings.



The pattern of the 2001 Quilt is "Bow Tie" and can be seen in the photo along with Rosemary Cosgrove (left) and Jean Berry (right). Our very special thanks to Phyllis Newton, Rosemary Cosgrove, Jean Berry, Kay Angeles, Gwen Emerson, and Connie Freeman. We sincerely appreciate their generosity towards the LMHS.

(The Legacy Quilt Guild meets on the third Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 9 p.m., September through June, at Cajon Park Elementary School in Santee.)

IN MEMORIAM

Tom Ridley
 Evelyn Estabrook
 Jerri Lopez
 Sandy Campbell
 Harry Griffen
 Barbara Floto
 Jean Guy

Winners of the Ice Cream Social Drawing (Held on June 2, 2001)

Patricia-Tyson

Queen-size quilt made and donated
 by Legacy Quilt Guild

American Legion Auxiliary, Unit 282

Lunch or dinner for two at Village
 Garden Restaurant

Sarah Miller

Gift Certificate at Henry's Market

George F. Bailey

Reuben H. Fleet Omnimax Passes

Judy Jo Beardslee

One pound box of See's Candy

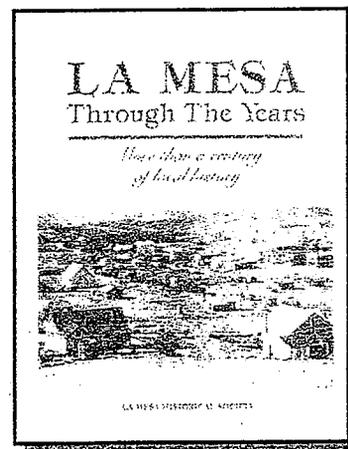
Mary-Em Howard

Framed original artwork

Jim Polak

Framed original artwork

The Perfect Holiday Gift



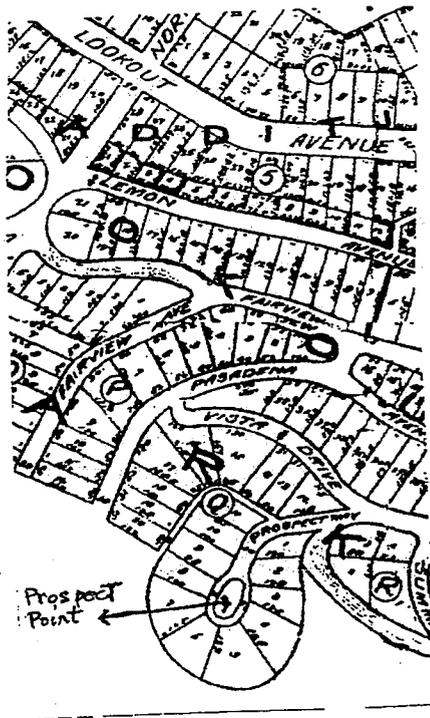
\$ 9.50 (LMHS members)
 \$12.50 (non-members)

Available at the McKinney House on
 Saturdays (12-3:00 p.m.),
 La Mesa Senior Center & City Hall

PROSPECT POINT

Site of La Mesa's First Easter Sunrise Service

by Pat Kettler



“On the summit of Mt. Nebo a circular park was made several years ago, at the opening of the Lookout Park tract. A pavilion has been built here and trees and shrubs planted then are now nearly full grown. This is called Prospect Point. On any day one may climb to the park, which is above the city less than 250 feet and about a half mile distant from the heart of the city, and enjoy there the cool ocean breeze. On the west San Diego city, then miles distant; the San Diego bay; Coronado, and Point Loma, the peninsulas that enclose the bay, and the deep blue oval of the Pacific ocean, can all be seen with the naked eye. On the south the mountains of Old Mexico are visible; on the east the higher peaks of the Coast Range mountains in the county, together with the fertile valleys intervening, are easily distinguished.”

*La Mesa Scout
April 5, 1912*

Prospect Point, one of La Mesa's first parks, is tucked away on top of a rise on Mt. Nebo. Over the years, trees that were planted in the early days of our history have grown to their full height, and lovely homes have been built around this small circle of a park. From the early days of La Mesa's history in the 1890's, and for many years thereafter, Prospect Point had become a popular walking destination for many of the town folk. High on Mt. Nebo, before the trees that were planted there grew up, you could clearly see “the world at your feet”.

In a certificate of title, filed with the County of San Diego on September 12, 1907, the C.C. Park and S.C. Grable families deeded the tract known as Prospect Point to the City of La Mesa for \$10.00. They specified that this tract was to be used for park purposes only.

In 1915, before houses were built around the circle, this small park became the site of La Mesa's first Easter sunrise service. The Easter service was held there once more, in 1916, and was moved to the summit of Mt. Helix the following year due to the growing number of people attending the service.

Thanks to Prospect Way homeowners, who had taken plans to the City of La Mesa for the park's improvement, the City has planted shrubs and grass and is in the process of installing a watering system for Prospect Point. A plaque will soon be installed in the park to commemorate the importance of the site. The plaque was paid for by the daughters of two Prospect Way families. The girls held a bake sale and raised the money to pay for the plaque. The plaque will have a 1916 view of the Easter sunrise service on Prospect Point etched onto it and it will read:

*Prospect Point - 1907
Site of La Mesa's First Easter Sunrise Service
Held on April 4, 1915*

An article from the La Mesa Scout, April 9, 1915

EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE ON MOUNT NEBO

It is estimated that nearly one thousand people assembled at the summit of Mount Nebo Sunday morning to participate in the Easter sunrise services held under the auspices of the churches of La Mesa. Shortly after daylight the pilgrimage to the top of the mount began, many people coming from San Diego, El Cajon, Spring Valley, La Mesa Heights and other nearby towns to join in the services of commemoration of the risen Christ. Shortly after 6:15 the people formed a body around the pavilion upon which was placed a large cross. Notwithstanding the sky was overcast a splendid view was had of the ocean, bay, mountains and valleys, adding to the impressiveness of the scene. The people joined heartily in the splendid service of song and prayer. The services surpassed in solemnity, impressiveness and beauty any ever held in this part of the state.

From the beginning of the service, when all joined in singing "Holy, Holy, Holy!", until the parting hymn, "God Be with You Till We Meet Again," there was not a break in the program as arranged by the committee. The services were inspiring and beautiful and a great deal of credit is due Mr. H. F. Worth, who had charge of the singing and directed the chorus. It is hoped that this will become an annual event in La Mesa, as there is not a more beautiful or inspiring spot in the county upon which to offer devotions to the Savior of mankind.

At the conclusion of the services on the mount the young people made a tour of the city and repeated the program for the benefit of the shut-ins and those who were too ill to attend the services. This thoughtfulness on the part of the young people was greatly appreciated by the sick ones.

For the benefit of those who were unable to attend and those living at a distance the program is published just as given on another page of this issue of the Scout.



Prospect Park atop Mt. Nebo, the site of the Easter sunrise services in 1915-16.

A Designated Historic Site

Wentz-Park House Landmarked

On March 27, 2001, the Wentz-Park House at 4603 Date Avenue became La Mesa's 14th Historic Landmark. This hip-roofed bungalow, one of the earliest erected in La Mesa, was constructed for Christopher and Olivia Wentz in 1910. It is still in excellent condition.

Christopher Wentz came to America with his German parents in 1846. The family was poor and Christopher had to go to work when he was ten years old. At first, he stripped tobacco in a New York cellar and then drove mules on the Pennsylvania Canal. Later, a Trenton merchant hired him to work in a wholesale grocery business. In a few years, Christopher was able to purchase the business. Then, with his profits, he began to erect substantial brick buildings, one of which he rented to the first Woolworth store in the country.

After his retirement from business, Christopher Wentz and his second wife, Olivia, came to California. On June 24, 1910, they purchased a lot on Date Avenue from Sherman and Lillian Grable. Thirteen days later, they hired John B. Davis, a La Mesa contractor, to build their house at the cost of \$2050.

Christopher Wentz said about La Mesa, "I am living in the best all-year climate in the world." Mr. and Mrs. Wentz lived in this house until his death on February 4, 1921. Olivia Wentz continued to reside in the house and, on April 23, 1923 married Charles Clarence Park, a widower who lived across the street at 4604 Date Avenue.

Charles Park, a native of Kansas, came to California in 1892. In 1906, he entered a partnership with Sherman Grable and founded the Park-Grable Investment Company. The company subdivided 200 acres of land in the Date Avenue area into town lots and stimulated the development of La Mesa. Among many firsts, Park & Grable had the town's first sewer system laid out and had the Canary Island date palms planted along Date Avenue.

Charles Park was important in La Mesa business. He founded the Park Lumber Company (later known as the La Mesa Lumber Company). He, with Sherman Grable, organized the Bank of La Mesa and was its president and one of its principal stockholders until it was sold to the Bank of Italy in 1927. Charles Park died on January 24, 1946.

After Olivia's death in 1949, their house was inherited by Bessie Martel, Olivia's niece. In 1964, the house was



acquired by Charles and Martha Creamer. Charles Creamer was a mechanic and, at one time, owned the Bostonia Garage. Martha was a devoted and loved member of the first Christian Church in El Cajon for over 40 years. She continued to live in this house until her death on October 3, 1994. She is still fondly remembered in the Date Avenue neighborhood.

Currently, Michael and Shirrell Bailey own the house and live there. They were instrumental in the landmarking of the Wentz-Park House, which is now an important representation of La Mesa's past.

Do you remember the old Scout House? If you have any photos or memories, please let us know. We need additional information to help us preserve the history of scouting in La Mesa.

Boy Scout House in Collier Park

In 1947, there were several Scout troops in La Mesa that had no suitable meeting place. Cdr. Hugh Olds, then chairman of the Grossmont District which included La Mesa and most of the county eastward of San Diego City, approached the City of La Mesa. He asked the City to allow a portion of the (Collier) park to be used by the Scouts and to allow the construction of a Scout House there. This was granted.

Various La Mesa citizens, organizations and five churches with Scout troops contributed \$1225 to construct the house. La Mesa Kiwanis gave the largest amount, \$500.

A surplus 20' by 40' barracks building was purchased from Miramar Naval Air Station for \$150 and a like amount was spent moving it to Collier Park. Volunteers constructed a foundation, a new roof, knotty pine interior panelling, plywood ceiling, and built a large stone fireplace and stone chimney. They installed a bark covered slab siding over the entire exterior to produce a rustic appearance. All the donated funds were spent for materials. All labor was volunteer.

A dedication ceremony was held in the park on Sunday, November 20, 1949. The mayor of La Mesa along with representatives from various churches, organizations, and the Boy Scout Council were present. La Mesa Scout troops put on a weekend camporee at the site. The building was dedicated to former Scouts who had lost their lives in World War II.

The Scout House served Scouts continuously until the early 1970s when all nearby troops had their own meeting place as furnished by their sponsors. The house fell into disrepair and was vandalized. It became a fire hazard. Cdr. Olds and the Scout Executive recommended that the City of La Mesa take over the building for such use as it might desire. As a result, the house was demolished by January 1975. But the little old Scout House did its job for many years.

The above information was furnished some years ago by Cdr. Hugh Olds, now deceased.

Boy Scouts Paint at the McKinney House

In mid-August, a dozen boys from La Mesa Boy Scout Troop 319 spent a week painting the historic outhouse and the Thelma Palermo Building on the McKinney House grounds.

The project was planned by Tyler Brown, an Eagle Scout candidate. Other boys who helped were: Daniel Shimell, Joshua Nach, Joseph Nach, Corey Brown, Justin Richardson, Kyle Krueger, Robert Scott, Aaron Queen, Thomas Dietsch, Joseph Houston, and Ryan Jeverold. They were supervised by parents associated with the troop. Tyler raised the funds for the paint and other equipment.

The scouts did a super job which saved the historical society a lot of money. The historical society appreciates their hard work.

Correction to Lookout Avenue.

Winter 2000/Spring 2001.

Edwards W. Porter, pg. 1:

It was James W. Porter who purchased the Dutch-gabled house called "Rose Hedge" in 1916, not Edwards. Edwards lived at "Rose Hedge" with his brother James and sister, Mary.

(Continued from page 2)

President's Report

members worked very hard scooping ice cream, running the drawing, and taking visitors through the McKinney House. We had two unexpected visitors, **Mr. and Mrs. Mallard** (real ducks), who flew in for the occasion and rested for a bit on the front lawn before the social started. Then they took off heading west. **Ed Blackman** had a great assortment of plants for sale. He dug some of them up in a neighbor's yard when his neighbor decided to redo the landscaping. In addition to



Maic Palmieri painting at the McKinney House.

the artists who demonstrated and painted in the house, the Hawaiian dancers on the front lawn were a traffic-stopping hit. Desiree Romero's little daughter was so intrigued by the dancers, she joined them and charmed us all. (Her mother was a docent in the house and kept track by peeking out the front door. We added more than \$1400 to our treasury from this event, due in part to the wonderful quilt donated to us for the drawing by the Heritage Quilt Guild. Thanks to everyone who purchased tickets and made this event a grand success.

Rose Garden Celebration and Tea

On July 1st, we held a Rose Garden Celebration Tea. Speakers **Michael Bliss** and **Maurice Taitano** told us a bit about landscaping. We added name plaques to our commemorative marker for **Jerri Lopez**, **Helen Odom**, **Florence Barnett** and **Velma C. Williams**

(Jo Coffey's mother). **Mayor Art Madrid** and **Councilwoman Ruth Sterling** spoke briefly about Jerri Lopez and her contributions to the city; **Susan Mitchell** talked about her dear friend, Helen Odom. Then, we were treated to a grand



Carol and Brice Lockwood at the Celebration Tea.

English tea, planned and presented by **Donna Niemeier**. She prepared all the food and gave everyone a set of authentic recipes. She was assisted in the McKinney House kitchen by **Sharon Crockett** and **Ruth Contino**. Some members of the **Victorian Ladies** group came in costume.



Ladies enjoying English Tea at the McKinney House.

Our New Book

While all of this was going on, we were writing, editing, and having printed our new book, *La Mesa-Through the Years*, which is now for sale to the public. Planned by journalist and board member, **Norrie West**, the book tells the history of our community in an easy-to-read format. Many of the photographs were obtained

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(Continued from page 8)

President's Report

by Norrie. He also masterminded the financing. Major donors to the book included the **City of La Mesa, Councilman Mark Allan, Andy and Lloyd Kitzman, Joe Drew and Drew Ford, and Edco Disposal Corp. (Ed and Sandy Burr).** Although mostly written by Norrie West, some sections were contributed by **Pat Kettler, Carol Lockwood,** and a bit by me. Without Norrie's inspiration and determination to get this book published, it never would have happened.

The book was launched on September 21st at a "book warming". The event was held at the home of **Anne Porter Hall** for those who had contributed to and helped in some way with our new book about the history of La Mesa. About 80 people came including **Mayor Art Madrid, Supervisor Dianne Jacob, and Bill Griffith** from Channel 10 who was the master of ceremonies. This event was planned by board members, **Gordon Jones and Norrie West.** Gordon also planned the LMHS Quarterly meeting at the La Mesa Depot on September 23rd. Highlights of the meeting were tours of the depot and train by **Duane Dubke** and a walking tour of Date Avenue led by **Kathy Tinsley.** Norrie autographed a lot of books at both events.

La Mesa-Through the Years has been selling well with more than half of the original printing of 1,000 books gone already. Our members sold more than \$1,000 worth of books at the Oktoberfest. If you are planning to obtain copies for yourself and to give to someone, I suggest that you purchase your books soon.

Many thanks to everyone who helped this year. We couldn't have done all this without **YOU.** We have many new members and welcome anyone who would like to participate in our plans and activities. You can always reach me at (619) 463-1029, or if you reach my answering machine, I promise to call back.

Karna Webster
LMHS President

(continued from page 1)

New History

for purchase at a cost of \$9.50 to members of the La Mesa Historical Society and \$12.50 to non-members. The book can be purchased at the McKinney House Museum on Saturday afternoons (12-3:00 p.m.). It will also be offered for sale at the La Mesa Senior Center, La Mesa City Hall and at the Stone Ground Coffee Shop on La Mesa Boulevard at a cost of \$12.50.

The La Mesa Historical Society is pleased to present this new history of our community. We believe that it is a book you will enjoy and value. You may want to buy a copy not only for yourself but for family and friends. It is a wonderful gift for any occasion and a memorable present for the holidays. For more information, contact Karna Webster at (619) 463-1029.

*Helix High School Year Books
(1953-1987)*

*have been donated to the LMHS archives
by Dr. Robert Freeland.*

**You are invited
to an**

**Old Fashioned
Christmas
Open House**

**Saturday, Dec. 8
1- 4:00 p.m.**

**at the
McKinney House**



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

UPCOMING DATES TO REMEMBER

- December 8 - Saturday Christmas Open House at the McKinney House
- February 16 - Saturday Program celebrating La Mesa's 90th Birthday
- April 28 - Sunday Annual Meeting & Luncheon • Brigantine Restaurant
- May 19 - Sunday Rose Garden Celebration
- June 22 - Saturday Ice Cream Social at the McKinney House



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