FALL 2020

lookout avenue





1921 Women's Club photo, at Rose Hedge Manor for Annual Meeting. La Mesa Women's Club Collection, LMHS Archives.

"Rightfully Hers" OUTDOOR EXHIBIT
Celebrating Women's Suffrage Centennial
coming to McKinney House grounds!
Join us September 19th and 26th
From 1:00 - 4:00 pm.
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DESIGN AND BRANDING

MCKINNEY HOUSE REPORT

"Rightfully Hers" outdoor exhibit celebrating Women's Suffrage Centennial coming to McKinney House grounds two Saturdays in September

Due to an abundance of caution and concern for the safety of our volunteers and visitors, the Archives Research Center and the McKinney House Museum remain closed. However, the LMHS is availing itself in the current circumstances to bring you our first outdoor exhibit.

Enhancing the Rightfully Hers exhibit, created and provided by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), we will have "socially distanced" panels highlighting the 100th anniversary of national suffrage for women lining the walkway and yard behind the McKinney House. In addition to the panels from NARA, the exhibit will include panels on the local story of the La Mesa women who worked for passage of Amendment Four to the California Constitution, bringing women's suffrage to the state nine years earlier in October 1911. Join us September 19th and 26th from 1:00 - 4:00 pm. Be sure to follow the signage, arrows, and spacing marks on the walkway to progress through the exhibit.

Continue to check our website lamesahistory.com and our Facebook site for updates on first "socially distanced exhibit."



La Mesas Own Helen Stoddard, La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

A YEAR UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Firstly, I once again sincerely hope that you and your families, friends and neighbors are well and continue to be so considering this has been a year unlike any other in La Mesa's history.

The last time I wrote to the membership it was early in the COVID-19 fight. We were lamenting about all the LMHS activities that were put on hold and how we were adapting. An online Board Election and postponed Annual Meeting, indefinitely closed museum and archives, canceled community events and shutdown of our SDSU interns were the issues at hand.

That all got significantly worse when La Mesa became a focus of the San Diego region's civic protests dealing with local and national issues of systemic racism, discrimination, and public safety justice. As a resident of downtown adjacent Boulder Heights, I had a close-up view of the tragic and destructive results of the civil unrest in downtown on the evening of May 30-31st. Having studied this community's history in-depth, it is not difficult to define that night as being the worst in the City's history.

In this edition of Lookout Avenue, we have reprinted our Board of Directors statement (posted online in June) addressing those events—including the hopeful and inspiring response of La Mesans, neighbors and artists who came out that Sunday morning to clean up and support our damaged businesses. We also mention our partnership with SDSU on gathering photos of the beautiful and poignant artwork created in response to these tragic events and the underlying societal ills driving the protests.

Similar to the current-event themed feature article in the last issue, of La Mesa's response to the Polio virus in 1948, you will find an article on the history of the three long-standing commercial buildings destroyed that fateful evening. This article is in response to the many requests about those buildings' histories. Interestingly, these histories reveal an integrated story of those buildings with each other, and their reflection of downtown's commercial history.

You will also see reports on how, although we are closed, we are trying to help serve our members, supporters and researchers requests. We are also continuing to move forward on our landscape rehabilitation and improvement project. You can read more in Tracey Stotz' article on our next round of improvements and fundraising.

We will also take advantage of our obtaining a special exhibit from the National Archives (Respectfully Hers) on the August centennial of U.S. Women's Suffrage. We will be using the McKinney House grounds to share that exhibit in an outdoor (and socially distanced layout) showing in September. We will also supplement this temporary exhibit with information on the local history of suffrage and the role of the ladies of La Mesa. Don't miss it—but bring your face covering and follow our distancing rules! Read the announcement in this newsletter and keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for more on this "outdoor exhibit."

You will also see an issue paper on a subject that has been in consideration within the Board of Directors for several years—better branding and identity for our organization. We are seriously looking at how to better identify

"President's Address" Continued on Page 4

"President's Address" Continued from Page 3

and promote what we do and make sure the community understands how to benefit from our great work and resources.

Of course, you may all be wondering about our annual La Mesa Home Tour. It is very important for LMHS to do this event, being our top fundraiser and outreach effort each year. The funds raised allow us to support the McKinney House, the Archives, and our other programs. And as such, we will be having a tour again this year—it will just be Virtual! We are working on the virtual program and will be taking a look back at our first fourteen tours in celebration of one of the Greater La Mesa Community's most revered events. See the Save the Date announcement in this issue and follow us as more information becomes available.

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In closing, I will provide some thoughts inspired from National Council of Public History president Marla Miller's Annual Meeting keynote speech given virtually this April (and published in the latest issue of The Public Historian journal). Her address considered how best to consider public history's "long-game value" during times of great challenge, frightening events, and immediate desire for action.

Miller started her talk with a familiar refrain for many of us who have practiced public history. We never really know how or when our history work will have impact. Will it be the first time someone reads our work, or sees our exhibit, or goes on our Home Tour? Or will it "hit them" as beneficial one, two, five or ten years down the line? The patience for such historical "long-run" values often get lost in the immediacy of the moment during trying times, along with today's infatuation with immediate and quickly consumable, but often unverified information. She notes that although it may always be too soon to calculate our full effect or know what specific groundwork for changes we are laying, we still need to continue our history efforts.
Dr. Miller grounded her thoughts with the work of colleague historian Rebecca Solnit. Solnit's 2004 book "Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities" reminding us to be especially careful not to lose hope in times when the present seems bleak. Miller re-examined and supported Solnit's recognition that historical context can help "supplant the assumptions that cripple us in despair" by cultivating a greater appreciation for what history can provide in perspective. For example, as we currently celebrate the National Suffrage for U.S. Women one hundred years ago, we may forget that that effort took activists nearly three quarters of a century to see their victory become reality. Some efforts are worthy of such dogged persistence—and history can help explain those struggles.

Such historical context is what we as a public history institution can hope to provide our members and the Greater La Mesa community as it wrestles with complex and controversial issues that can lead to challenging, unfamiliar or previously unrecognized perspectives and narratives.

Subsequently, as Miller concludes, there may not be a better time to be public history practitioners. Such times call for the perspective and insight public history institutions provide, and for them to "seize the moment" and be open to the "possibilities for new thinking and action." Here is to the hope that we at the La Mesa Historical Society can be such an institution for using the stories of our collective past to help formulate a more equitable future.

As always, thanks for your support, feel free to contact me at info@lamesahistory.com with your thoughts.

Take care of yourselves, your families, and our community.

Jim Newland

Jim Newland
President, La Mesa Historical Society

BUY A BRICK:

MORE THAN JUST A DONATION TO THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT

We recently received a heart-warming letter from Aileen Teague who, with her siblings, purchased a brick in honor of her parents Richard and Betty Teague.

In the letter Ms. Teague shared that she is the youngest of four siblings who grew up in La Mesa starting in the late 1950s. "The brick we are purchasing is significant to us because we wanted to honor our parents and support the town we have such fond memories of while growing up," she wrote.

She also talked of Richard and Betty's involvement with La Mesa and enclosed Betty's obituary. In part it read, "Betty loved welcoming visitors to the McKinney House and making it come alive with her stories. School tours would be shown the storage space under the stairs – the "cubbyhole" – and the drawer in the dining room where Florence McKinney kept toys for her visiting grandchildren."

Mrs. Teague died in 1998 so her time serving as a docent was more than 20 years ago yet we still tell the same stories to visitors to the house museum. That is one of the ways in which history can bring us together – through the telling and retelling of the stories of La Mesa.

We love to hear stories of the role La Mesa has played historically in the lives of our residents. Drop us a note and perhaps your story will be shared in a future article.



Landscape Project Needs Your Support

The summer heat and the COVID quarantine have slowed down the landscape project. Donations are down as well. Unfortunately, the new pine tree also died. Not the best report! However, Artistic Arbor Gardens, the landscape company who provided the first tree, has another pine waiting to plant in the fall (the appropriate time to plant.) Drainage appeared to be the problem with the last tree and they are developing a plan to remedy that prior to the next planting.

"In addition to the new tree, our next phase includes painting the house, adding irrigation and finishing the fencing," said Tracey Stotz, chair of the Landscape Committee. The committee, which includes Board members Don Cary, Kristin Dooley, Jim Newland, and Alex Quintero, continues to work behind the scenes to secure donations and seek bids on the rest of the work. Thank you to Rotary Club of La Mesa, Stephen and Sheryl Castro, and A.P.T.S. Inc. for recent generous gifts to help with the next phase of the project. More donations are needed, however, to move the project forward.

The on-going fundraising campaign is "Buy A Brick." The inscribed bricks are $100 and include three lines of content. The first order of bricks has been installed and lines a planter bed/path winding through the front yard of the property. To purchase a brick in support of the campaign log on to: https://lamesahistory.com/product/buy-a-brick/

"Our original intent was to have a ribbon cutting ceremony when phase one was complete but at this time we are on hold due to safety concerns," Stotz stated. The website, lamesahistory.com, will have more details on upcoming events once the site is open.

CHANGES ARE COMING TO LMHS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ADDRESS BRANDING/NAME ISSUES

For several years the Board of the Historical Society has been concerned that the name "La Mesa Historical Society" does not properly describe the purpose, programs and resources that the organization provides to the Greater La Mesa community (GLMC).

BACKGROUND: Established in 1975 during the national rise in local history inspired by the U.S. Bicentennial, the Society was formed by mostly pioneering local family members who had connections with early La Mesa. Similar to other historical organizations, they acquired a historical property (McKinney House) and established a "house museum" in the 1980s. As the membership evolved over the decades in the early 2000s the Society moved toward a focus promoting historic preservation, historical presentations (Roundtable Programs) and expanding the archives. The now popular Home Tours started in 2006 and quickly gained more attention, becoming the organization's main annual fund raiser. The City's Centennial Celebration in 2012 and subsequent interest in the research archives reset the priorities to a broader focus of the organization's role in the history and preservation of far more than the early City—including the associated adjacent communities of Grossmont/Mt Helix, Fletcher Hills, Casa de Oro, Rancho San Diego/ Sweetwater, San Carlos/Del Cerro and the College Neighborhoods (of which we collectively identify as the Greater La Mesa area).

THE CHALLENGE: It has been our recent experience, especially with the successes of the last few years' Home Tours, that our full range of historical services and value to the GLMC are not well recognized. Many Members or local residents often appear to be unaware of our full range of services or archival resources coverage.

OUR NAME: One of the issues identified is how many in the community perceive the organization due to its name. . The name "Historical Society" has a connotation of a group that "meets socially to discuss the old times," but does not invoke or infer the range of services and values we provide to the whole community as a public history institution.

BRANDING GOALS: Although the official name is part of our non-profit incorporation, the Board is working to create a "doing business as" (DBA) name that better explains and brands the Institution's purpose and services.

Messaging Needs/Goals:

- We have a Research Archives & Our Collections include the "Greater La Mesa" area
- We practice and support the discipline of History—for all GLMC members/groups
- We support Historic Preservation efforts throughout the GLMC
- Our Museum and Archives are an active, community asset
- Our Membership reflects the GLMC's diverse community and its interests
- Our Programming is current and relevant

ACTION COMING: As such the Board of Directors is working toward creation of a dba that addresses all the key variables for developing a name that better reflects our geographic scope, and the services we currently provide. We hope to have this process complete and unveiled in 2020. Be assured that we are still committed to supporting and serving our membership and the whole of the GLMC.

Jim Newland
LMHS Board President

ARCHIVES REPORT

Limited Research Service Available

Recognizing the need for those with specific needs to access our unique archival collections during this period, and complying with the public health safety for our volunteers and guests, along with preservation needs of our original materials, the Society is offering a limited research service for $25 per hour to those with time sensitive research needs. For example, we have completed several specific research tasks for property owners working on landmark nominations. If you have a research need, please contact us at info@lamesahistory.com to see if we have the capacity to assist you.

Volunteer Opportunities

Interested in volunteering despite not being able to come into the Archives Research Center and McKinney House Museum? Consider a transcription project! The LMHS Archives has many hand-written journals and diaries that are difficult to access due to their physical condition and the script they are written in. We also have sorting, indexing, cataloging and organizing tasks that can be completed without needing to be at the Archives physically. If you are interested in learning more about these opportunities, contact us at info@lamesahistory.com.

Thanks to our Renewing Members! 1/1/20 - 8/31/20

Melody Andrews
Barbara Balaban
Kristel Bóe
Charles Bras
Ken & Edythe Brown
Ron & Vickie Cady
Charlotte Cagan
Skip Carter Way
Loretta Chavez
Steven Christiansen
Ruth Contino
Charles Correia
Charlene Craig
Cindy Davis
Don & Julie DeMent
Keith Dindinger
Karin Dodson
Helen Dowdy
Ron Edwords
George Fahouris
Diane Finch-Payne
Connie Garner
John Grasberger
Michele Greenberg-McClung
Herbert Hafter
Laura Halgren
Matthew Halgren
Norm Hapke
Jolene Harwell
Joseph Hofmann
Isreal Huerta
James Hogins
Richard Hoy
Jill Hurlburt
Linda Johnson
Lisa & Dan Kincaid
Vera Skop Knianicky
Tom Lamar
Joanne Lavin
Rob Logic
Esther Long
Wendy Marchbanks
Victoria Mattar
Michael Matteucci
Michael Medeiros
Troy Murphree
Luis Naranjo
Donna Niemeier
Russ Novak
Carmen Pauli
Todd Pitman
Brooks Pauly
Bill Pogue
Chris & Betsy Quinn
Pamela Rader
Brenda Richmond
Mark Robak
John Robbins
Michael Rummel
Ann Schwartzwald
Nancy Shelton
Ruth Simpson
Rose Snow
Tracey Stotz
Diane Svensson
Rick Sweeney
Nita Swisher
Kathy Tinsley
Isaac Ullah
Darlene Vogt
Glenda Wade
Budd & Vicki Willis
Linda Wills

LA MESA COMMUNITY ART DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

This project is a crowd-sourced documentation project aimed at collecting and curating digital media files (images, videos, audio) of spontaneous public art that has appeared all around the City of La Mesa in recent weeks. These pieces of art have been created on transitory media, such as plywood, cardboard, river rocks, or sidewalk chalk, or are themselves singular events, such as musical performances, spoken poems, vigils, and more.

The main goal of this project is to collect and preserve digital recordings of these pieces of art for future generations. The long-term plan is to curate them in a robust, publicly accessible digital repository for future study and/or interpretive display in a museum or online educational context. The project is working with both SDSU and the La Mesa Historical Society to accomplish these goals and is grounded in an inclusive and community-engaged public history approach to local history.

We want to thank all of you for the support of the beautiful and poignant artwork created in La Mesa after the events of May 30th. The vast majority of these wonderful pieces of art had already been removed/dismantled as La Mesa reopened. Therefore, we want to pass on this great archiving project partnership with SDSU and the Society to document the temporary and ephemeral artwork.

Jim Newland,
LMHS President

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This project is headed by Dr. Isaac Ullah. Dr. Ullah is a La Mesa resident, a professional Archaeologist, and an Associate Professor of Anthropology at San Diego State University. Issac is also a City Historic Preservation Commissioner. You can read more about Dr. Ullah at his website: http://isaacullah.github.io



One of the Murals, La Mesa 2020

AN INFAMOUS DAY AND PLEDGE OF HOPE FOR LA MESA

LMHS RESPONDS TO EVENTS OF MAY 30, 2020 AND BEYOND

The following was posted on the LMHS Facebook and Instagram pages on June 14, 2020.

Dear LMHS Members, Friends and Followers,

The past few weeks' events and experiences, including those in our local community, can only remind us of our nation's challenging history of discrimination, violence and racism. This is a very personal history for many that sadly continues into the present.

We, the La Mesa Historical Society Board of Directors, wish to acknowledge the loss of life, injury, pain, anger, and emotional impacts of events nationally, as well as those that have come to pass here in our community.

As an institution charged with collecting, preserving and educating on the values and worth of history and historic preservation, we are dedicated to ensuring that all stories of the Greater La Mesa communities are captured, preserved and made available to inspire a better tomorrow.

We commit that our non-profit organization will endeavor to be an institution that collects, preserves, studies and presents the cultural history of all of us without ignoring the stories of any race, gender or creed.

Yet, any great societal movements require ordinary people to come together to effect real and meaningful change. The uplifting response of hundreds of volunteers, including some of our own Board and Society members and partners on Sunday morning May 31st in our downtown is one such effort. Their bringing brooms, brushes, paint and materials to clean up and secure the damaged businesses is a sign of our community's underlying character. These were not just City of La Mesa residents but those from the entire Greater La Mesa area and beyond. Over the following days numerous artists and community members created beautiful and poignant murals and art that reflected and demonstrated not only our community's pride and spirit to persevere and overcome—but sending a clear message of empathy and compassion for the greater cause of justice and equality for all Americans.

It is with such actions that our community can continue to live up to its now nearly century old motto of "Jewel of the Hills." Significant and lasting improvements are still needed but it is a renewed start for fulfilling our potential to provide those opportunities for everyone, especially our communities of color. A goal that La Mesa Historical Society fully supports.

La Mesa Historical Society Board of Directors



One of the beautiful and poignant Murals, La Mesa 2020

15TH ANNUAL HOME TOUR GOES VIRTUAL FOR 2020

CELEBRATING GREATER LA MESA ARCHITECTURAL GEMS

A Virtual Trip from the Gilded Age to the Space Age November 14th

Fifteen years ago La Mesa Historical Society president Gordon Jones created a community event that has grown into a can't miss annual celebration of our collective architectural heritage. Over the years the event has expanded its geographic scope to include the Greater La Mesa region's array of beautiful and historic homes, drawing visitors from throughout San Diego and southern California.

Our Home Tour Committee had planned to celebrate the 15th year of this much anticipated annual community and Society event with an ode to our own home tour history. As such, as we had to make the call to move this year's event to a virtual, on-line tour to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, it provided a perfect venue to go back and check in on the over 90 homes, and generous owners who have shared these amazing properties with us.



2019 TOUR: Adams Complex Residence (1959), Designer/Builder: John Mortenson



2016 TOUR: Ullman House (1964), Architect: Hendrick & Mock Architects



2013 TOUR: McKinney House (1908)

"15th Annual Home Tour" Continued on Page 11

"15th Annual Home Tour" Continued from Page 10



2016 TOUR: Jach House (1966), Builder: John Mortenson



2017 TOUR: Weatherall House (1955), Architect: C.J. Paderewski

LIVE Event Saturday November 14th

Our virtual "Home Tour Event" will be held on Saturday November 14th. The program will include a brief history of the La Mesa Historical Society's Home Tour heritage, including a look back at each year's tour homes along with presentations featuring previous tour homeowners including updates on the homes today, along with real time Q&A sessions for ticket holder guests.

Keep an eye on our Facebook, Instagram and web pages for more details on how to purchase tickets and get access to our Crystal Year review of Greater La Mesa's architectural gems.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE UPDATES

Historical Survey Update

COVID-19 has put a hurdle in the path of our SDSU students doing any field work or research in our archives at least through the Fall semester. In the meantime, we have compiled many digital files (including hundreds of photographs of La Mesa buildings) and data that can be used to start creating property inventory forms. We will continue to work with our SDSU and City partners on keeping the survey update moving forward. Let us know if you are interested in helping out.

New Book on La Mesa History Coming Later this Year!

La Mesa native and Historical Society member Esther Drew Long has completed her family history, "The Drew Heritage." Esther, daughter of Elmer and Violet Drew of Drew Ford has completed a chronicle of her family's history centered on their lives and long-serving business here in La Mesa. Well-researched, it also provides many insights to events and life in La Mesa's history from the 1920s up to today. Published by Bloomery Forge Press in Colorado it is expected to be available by the end of the year. Esther has graciously offered the sales profits of the book to the Society.

A SMALL TOWN'S INTERCONNECTED HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

THE HISTORY OF THE THREE BUILDINGS LOST ON MAY 30TH REVEAL OUR SMALL TOWN'S INTERTWINED COMMERCIAL PAST

Almost immediately after the tragic destruction of three recognizable commercial buildings on the evening of May 30th-31st, the Society and myself began to receive requests for information on the history of the three iconic architectural staples of downtown La Mesa's historic landscape. Upon gathering the stories of each of these prominent, long-standing commercial buildings it became clear that they had unrecognized historical connections to each other, as well as with other buildings and sites within downtown's contextual history.

For more recent La Mesa residents the presence of these three commercial buildings; the First National Bank/Piggly Wiggly Market (1942) at 4757 Palm, the Imperial Savings/Chase Bank (1973) at 4791 Spring, and the Southern California First National/Union Bank (1974) at 4771 Spring may have had little personal connection. Unless you were a member of the two banks or a client to the Randall Lamb engineering firm that had masterfully rehabilitated that Palm Avenue building you may not have ever gone inside any of them.



First National Trust/Piggly Wiggly Building (1942), 4767 Palm Avenue, Edmund Dunn, master builder. Randall Lamb Engineering, rehab designers. May 2020.



Imperial Savings/Chase Bank (1973), Richard George Wheeler, architect. 4791 Spring Street, May 2020.

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued on Page 13

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued from Page 12



Southern California First National/Union Bank (1974), 4771 Spring Street, Russell Forster, architect. May 2020.

Personally, I had only been inside the Randall Lamb building when we had partnered to put a historic photo plaque on the building some five years ago. And although I had driven and walked by the other two bank buildings thousands of times and had taken photographs of them just weeks before as part of our City Historical Survey update efforts, I never had a reason to go inside either building. Yet, they reflected the Modern interpretation of bank architecture from two renown San Diego architects that were clearly reminiscent of their early 1970s pedigree.

La Mesa's Banks: Icons of Community Growth and Strength

Having researched local bank history back in the 1990s including El Cajon's pioneering Cuyamaca Bank buildings (1907 and 1922) once located on the southwest corner of Magnolia and Main Streets (the second building demolished for a street widening project in the mid-1990s), the history of bank architecture is one of symbolic significance. Regular bank failures in the 19th century led financial institutions to commission 20th century designs representing what their customers would perceive as both institutional stability and financial safety.

The Bank of La Mesa being our community's first local bank. The Bank's original 1909 building was located at the northwest corner of Spring and Lookout (now La Mesa Blvd.) used its California-influenced austere Irving Gill design to represent a "modern" forward-thinking institution for the young Progressive Era community. After the building was destroyed in a 1919 fire, it was replaced by a more typical "Classical" style concrete-walled building in 1921.



Bank of La Mesa/Park-Grable Investment Building (1909), Spring at Lookout, Irving Gill, architect. June 1912. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

In 1926 A.P. Giannini's San Francisco based Bank of Italy purchased and renamed La Mesa's hometown bank. Then in 1931 they changed their name to its current moniker, the Bank of America. They continued to use this building until moving to a new bank constructed at 4719 Palm Avenue by Lemon Grove master builder Edmund Dunn in 1955. (The 1921 Bank of La Mesa/Bank of America building was torn down for the Anthony's Furniture Store construction in 1955 (current site of the Goodwill Store).

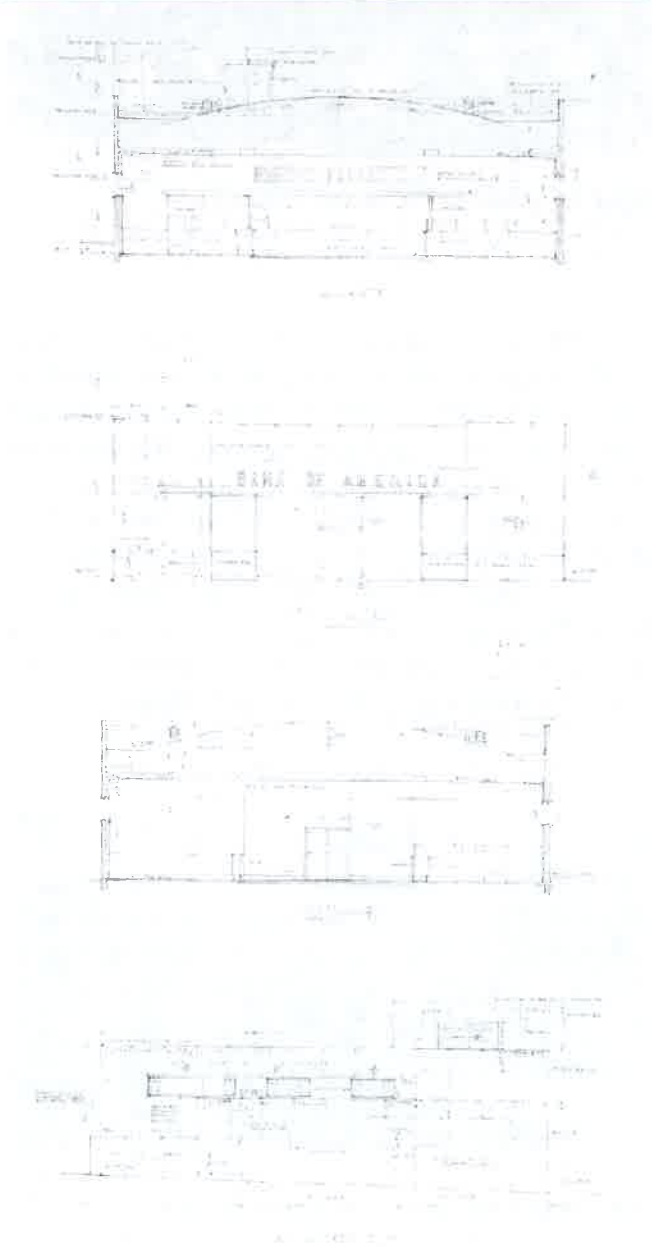


Bank of La Mesa/Bank of American Building (1921). Spring at Lookout. Circa 1940. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued on Page 14

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued from Page 13





Bank of American Building (1955). 4719 Palm Avenue. Photo May 2020. Raymond Shaw, architect. Edmund Dunn, contractor. Original Drawings from Dunn Collection. La Mesa Historical Society Archives



Anthony's Furniture (1955), 8250 La Mesa Blvd. remodeled. April 2020.

Bank of Southern California Arrives

With Southern California in the midst of another real estate and development boom in the mid-1920s another bank assembled a mixture of local and regional investors to open a branch in growing La Mesa. That was the aptly named Bank of Southern California. Formed in 1926 the new financial institution included investors from the First Trust and Savings Bank of San Diego and San Diego Trust and Savings Bank, both of which dated their origins to the 1880s. First Trust Bank President I.I. Irwin was also instituted as the initial Board president of the new La Mesa-based bank. The Bank's directors included local East County investors J. O. Miller of La Mesa (bank manager), George Graves of El Cajon, A. F. Sonka of Lemon Grove and Mt Helix pioneer resident and developer Fred J. Hansen. In January 1927, the new Bank opened for business in a rented space across the street next to the La Mesa Drug Store.

The Bank then purchased the prominent northeast corner of Palm and Lookout (now La Mesa Blvd.), demolished the 1908 La Mesa Opera House theater building and started construction on a new $30,000 bank building in Spring 1927. The new Bank of Southern California building also featuring an addition on its Palm Avenue frontage to house a new, modern Post Office and additional storefronts on the Lookout Avenue side. In August 1927, their new building was open along with the new

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued on Page 15

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued from Page 14

Post Office, and Fred Hansen's real estate office. This prominent building featured thick concrete walls in a Mediterranean Revival style reflective of 1920s Southern California. Today most know this as the long-standing home of Por Favor Restaurant.



Bank of Southern California (1927), 8300 Lookout Avenue. New Post Office at rear with empty lots to the south in view. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

The Bank quickly became a prominent member of the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce and helped finance the commercial and residential development of the community. Although the Boom of the 1920s would start to slow in late 1928 and collapse with the onset of the Great Depression, the Bank would survive the financially challenging 1930s. One of the ways they accomplished this was to merge in June 1934 with their larger San Diego based investment partner the First National Trust and Savings Bank.

First National Trust New Modern Bank and Piggly Wiggly Super-Market

After lasting out the Depression years, San Diego's ties to the military and aircraft industry began to pay off. With World War II underway in Europe, San Diego's military and aircraft industry boomed, thus triggering a rapid and exponential growth known as "the Blitz Boom." From 1939 to 1943 the County's population would double—as would La Mesa's. Soon any available housing or commercial space was in demand.

Recognizing that their beautiful and sturdy concrete-walled building would not be easily expanded, and no other commercial buildings were available in the growing town of 4,000, the Bank looked to find a new building location in La Mesa. Early in 1941 First National purchased empty lots 32 and 33 in the triangular shaped Hood Tract directly north of the Bank across the alley behind the Bank/Post Office buildings. They partnered with another long-standing business, the Piggly-Wiggly Supermarket company. One of the attractions for the Piggly-Wiggly to move off its original location at 8313 La Mesa Boulevard was the fact that the new commercial property would have free off-street parking—a key element of supermarket design that would make them perfect anchors for automobile oriented suburban shopping centers.



Prosperous Lookout Avenue, 1929. Original Piggly Wiggly Market next to La Mesa Drug Store. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

In July 1941 First National and Piggly Wiggly announced their mutual construction projects on Palm Avenue. The $50,000 concrete walled First National Trust bank and $15,000 masonry block supermarket representing two of the largest commercial projects undertaken in La Mesa at that time. Although both had hoped

"A Small Town's Interconnected" Continued on Page 16

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to be open by Christmas 1941, challenges in getting materials and the U.S. entry into World War II after the December 7th attack on Pearl Harbor delayed completion.

On Friday March 13, 1942, La Mesa's Piggly Wiggly opened its new store, touting their "free parking lot" and full service one-stop grocery store at 4767 Palm. Its Streamline Modern style facade was considered cutting-edge for supermarket design at the time. For southern Californians in the 1930s notable Los Angeles architect Styles Clements' Streamline Ralph's Grocery stores set the Pre-War supermarket design standard.



Piggly Wiggly Advertisement announcing new Building at 4767 Palm Avenue. La Mesa Scout March 13, 1942. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

One month later on Saturday April 18th 1942 First National Trust held a late afternoon open house for its new branch. Lemon Grove master builder Edmund Dunn had completed the building at 4757 Palm. The La Mesa Scout of April 17th described it glowingly:

Modern. Handsome, Complete. As fine a banking house as any city in the country can boast, and large enough to take care of the needs of this growing community for years to come.

The Scout remarked on the modern features in design, furnishing and mechanical equipment. Noting that "The handsome interior combines the ideas of bankers, architects, artists and decorators of sound, lighting and air conditioning engineers in foreseeing...the comfort and convenience of bank patrons." The new lighting providing "daylight" throughout and the latest in air conditioning to control temperature and humidity to insure comfort year-round in the windowless building.


New Bank Invites Inspection

First National at La Mesa To Be Open From 4 to 8 p.m. Saturday

Modern. Handsome. Complete. As fine a banking house as any city in the country can boast, and large enough to take care of the needs of this growing community for years to come.

This is what visitors to the new La Mesa office, First National Bank, will find when they inspect the building at 4767 Palm avenue, as the guests opening day, Saturday, April 18, from 4 to 8 p.m. The bank will be open for business the following Monday morning.

At least the bank's executives anticipate that it will be large enough to take care of La Mesa's growth. But no surprising and unanticipated has been the building rate and population increase in this city and surrounding territory that the bank executives won't be unduly surprised if the new institution in a decade or so does find itself outgrowing even the beautiful new home that when designed a year ago was expected to meet future local requirements indefinitely.

The mechanical equipment and furniture of the First National's new home could hardly be surpassed. The handsome interior combines the ideas of bankers, architects, artists and decorators; of electric lighting and air conditioning engineers in foreseeing the comfort of the public mind, and in anticipating the comfort and convenience of bank patrons.

There is "daylight" in every inch of the interior, but it is artificial daylight that does not vary whether it be sunny or after dark, outside, and that has been measured so that there will be adequate illumination to avoid strain on the eyes in corners that would have been in semi-darkness were ordinary or skylight lighting used.

The air in the great room will be changed every four minutes, with heat and humidity control winter and summer, and no draughts.

The latest arts of the chemists and research engineers have contributed to the materials which finish the walls, the floors, the counters and other furniture. There is an almost unlimited amount of cabinet and filing space, cleverly contrived in its intricate detail to provide a simple and smoothrunning banking unit, elastic to meet demands of expansion but free from complications.

In this bank, in fact the First National executives have given everything in the way of thought and attention—almost loving care—that an enthusiastic hobbyist puts in his avocation.

"We always have had the idea of furnishing fine banking facilities where we are a suburban community that gave future promise," says C. H. Schmidt, the bank's executive vice president. "Long ago we picked the La Mesa area as a most favorable spot, and I can say with the greatest enthusiasm that we have not been disappointed."

Grand Opening article, First National Trust and Savings Bank, La Mesa Scout April 17, 1942. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

Dr. Roy Campbell, reverend of La Mesa's Congregational Church, and many times Mt. Helix Easter Services pastor, wrote in his May 8, 1942 Scout column a few weeks later of the impressive and modern building. Campbell clearly requested that all who could, should visit the building. He described it glowingly:

"It is shadowless and noiseless. The lighting is like sunshine. There are no windows. And the newfangled walls absorb noise. Fancy that—drink it up like a sponge does water."

In the same edition, one of La Mesa's most famous residents added a similar testimonial. Carrie Jacobs Bond, noted poet, author and Grossmont resident wrote a letter to the

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First National Bank manager, referencing a promotional booklet that the bank had produced with some of her verse about La Mesa.

"I am so perfectly delighted with the "Jewel of the Hills," and I have never seen such a lovely picture of my little spot. I deeply appreciate your honoring me by putting my little verse in the magazine. I am so proud of La Mesa."

For the next twenty years the First National Bank and Piggly Wiggly represented the growing, modernizing suburban city. Although Piggly Wiggly would later be bought out by Safeway Stores and close their 4767 Palm location in 1960 (to move to its new building at 4630 Palm—now home to Sprouts) the old storefront continued as a market into the 1960s. First National Trust continued to the use the site up into the early 1970s as well. Located just one block north of La Mesa Blvd. and one block west of Spring Street, bounded by Orange Avenue's eastern terminus (now it is just an alley), its location was as central La Mesa as could be for a local bank and commercial building.

Downtown Challenges Bring Change

As the City continued its exponential suburban growth through the 1950s and 1960s, including the annexation of today's City lands north of Interstate 8 along with the Grossmont Center and Fletcher Hills areas to the east, downtown's city center and commercial focus was affected. Up to 1958 La Mesa City Hall sat at the northeast corner of Spring and Orange. With that important civic building located there, the entire block between Spring, Orange, Palm and Allison was fully developed with commercial and retail buildings.

The first big change downtown was the development of the City's Civic Center on Allison Avenue, west of Spring (the current location) in the late 1950s. When the new city hall opened there in 1958 (the only building from the 1950s left there today), along with Grossmont



Sanborn Map, La Mesa Sheet 6 crop, 1961 Series. This circa 1959 map shows Orange Avenue's eastern block and the commercial buildings that would be removed in 1973 to make way for redevelopment. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

Center Regional Mall opening in October 1961, downtown La Mesa's fifty-year reign as the commercial hub of the greater La Mesa area was being questioned.

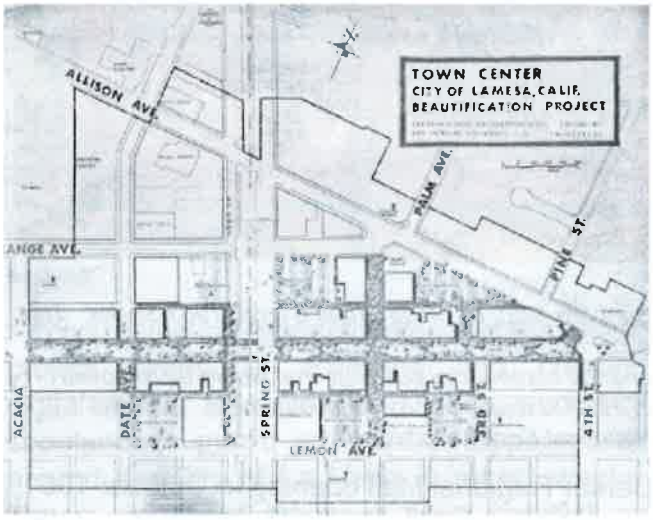
The City and La Mesa Chamber of Commerce spent significant time, effort, and funds toward a new plan for re-vitalizing the historic commercial core. The Town Center project, led by La Mesa architect Robert DesLauriers considered significant changes for downtown including a pedestrian mall closing portions of La Mesa Blvd and Palm Avenue as well as other investment to help the long-standing businesses compete with the new regional shopping mall and its Marston's Department Store and Montgomery Wards anchor stores. With the City Council's surprising 1966 rejection of the five year plus Town Center Plan effort, the City would turn to a new plan for redevelopment of downtown in the early 1970s.

ReDevelopment East of Spring Street

Most La Mesans can recognize the City's major redevelopment efforts of the 1970s in the properties west of Spring Street including the La Mesa Springs Shopping Center and Village Plaza Housing Tower and Trolley Station that cleared the north side of La Mesa Blvd. to Acacia Avenue and out through to University Avenue. Those redevelopment projects resulting in

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La Mesa Town Center Project Concept Map c1960. DesLaurier Collection, La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

the closure of most of Orange Avenue west of Spring Street.

Although the La Mesa Downtown Merchants Association initially were opposed to the City's Redevelopment Project, they changed their position when concerns for additional parking and significant investment were addressed in the plans. In June 1973, the City Council approved beginning the City's 45-acre downtown Redevelopment District planning effort.

One of the City's earliest downtown "redevelopment inspired" projects included two significant new buildings east of Spring Street. Following City Attorney's Lee Knutson's activating the City's redevelopment function in early 1973, the above-mentioned block between Spring, Orange, Palm and Allison that held the former City Hall and other business buildings was ready for new uses. Soon after the buildings on Block C were razed. It was then that two long-standing La Mesa banking institutions interested in creating new, "Modern" homes for their banks moved to re-develop the block with new bank buildings.

Imperial Savings/Chase Bank (4791 Spring Street)

Imperial Savings and Savings Loan Association was the first to move forward. They purchased the property on the southeast corner of Spring and Allison. In late June, flanked by Mayor Robert Helland and La Mesa Chamber of Commerce past president Charles Robison, Imperial Savings President Harry Holthusen (who lived in Eastridge) and branch manager Joseph Kinzer held the ceremonial groundbreaking for their new building.



Groundbreaking ceremonies took place Tuesday for the new office of Imperial Savings and Loan Assn. in La Mesa. The new office at Spring and Allison Streets will have a total of 5,800 square feet and will provide 30 parking spaces for customer use. Taking part in the ceremony were (l to r) Charles Robison, immediate past president, La Mesa Chamber of Commerce; Joseph Kinzer, manager, La Mesa branch of Imperial Savings; Mayor Robert Helland; and Harry Holthusen, president of Imperial Savings and Loan.

Groundbreaking for Imperial Savings and Loan Bank, 4791 Spring Street. June 28, 1973 La Mesa Scout. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

Imperial Savings and Loan had its start locally in 1946 under the name of La Mesa-El Cajon Savings & Loan. Their original building was located at 8347 La Mesa Blvd, southwest corner of Third Street (now site of First Republic Bank). In 1958 they changed their name to Southland Savings & Loan to reflect their growth beyond our local area. After several mergers and acquisitions the savings and loan became Imperial Savings with branches in over 30 cities throughout southern California by 1973. Many remember film and "Green Acres" television star Eddie Albert as their long-standing spokesperson.

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During this period of growth, Imperial Savings had retained the noted San Diego architectural firm of Richard George Wheeler Associates. Wheeler's firm having designed their new Parkway Plaza branch in El Cajon (buit by La Mesa contractor Riha Construction) and the Chula Vista branch for Imperial Savings, both in 1972. Wheeler, whose father was noted San Diego master architect William Henry Wheeler, had grown his firm into one of the largest and most prolific in post-war San Diego. The firm's portfolio including custom residences, tract homes, commercial, retail, religious, government and institutional commissions. Some of his most notable work being for notorious San Diego businessman C. Arnholt Smith, including several of his U.S. National Bank branches, as well as for First National Trust and Savings Bank—as well as Imperial Savings.

Wheeler's design for the new 5,800 square foot Imperial Savings La Mesa branch took advantage of its corner location to face out toward the heavy traffic of Spring Street. After the June 1973 groundbreaking the building was completed in December 1973, formally opening shortly before Christmas. Imperial Savings then held a special week-long Grand Opening celebration starting on January 2, 1974. The opening featured free gifts including an "energy-saving wheel" to help residents save money during the height of the 1973 oil embargo and "energy-crisis."

Imperial Savings continued to grow with the region. In the 1980s the savings and loan merged, went national and changed its name several times. In 1990 however, as result of the national savings and loan crisis, Imperial Federal Savings Association failed, was placed in receivership, and reorganized. The San Diego based company moved its headquarters from San Diego in 1995. After various reorganizations, mergers and purchases Chase Bank took over the assets including the La Mesa branch building.





Imperial Savings and Loan Association officially opened its doors at Spring Street and Allison Monday morning. Opening the new La Mesa branch were from left to right Vice-Mayor Mark Uselton; President of Imperial Savings and Loan, Harry Holthusen; Miss La Mesa, Robin Brown; and Joseph Kinzer, vice-president and manager of the La Mesa office.

Imperial Savings and Loan under construction. La Mesa Scout November 15, 1973 (top), and Open for business. La Mesa Scout December 20, 1973 (bottom). La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

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Imperial Savings Grand Opening, La Mesa Scout January 10, 1974. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

Southern California First National Bank/ Union Bank (4771 Spring Street)

With the opportunity to once-again update their bank building in 1973, the renamed Southern California First National Bank at 4757 Palm purchased the parcel across the street that had included the former City Hall and the recently closed portion of Orange Avenue. First National Trust and Southern California First National having merged into a financial institution with 69 branches in San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles counties.

In November 1973 First National's La Mesa branch manager Ken Trent and key bank officials broke ground for a new 6,850 square foot, $1 million building to replace their 1942 building. Trent noted that the new office would provide significant customer-serving amenities including eight teller stations, four drive through kiosks and 49 parking spaces. Trent commenting that "our customers will appreciate the conveniences."

Similar to Imperial Savings, First National had


Ken Trent, at the controls, vice president and manager of La Mesa office of Southern California First National Bank celebrates groundbreaking with fellow officers on the site of a new banking office on Spring Street. With him, from left, are Del Haynes, a consumer lending officer, Alice Alvarez, administrative officer and Dan Dougherty, consumer lending officer, all from the La Mesa office. The 6,850 square foot building is scheduled to open in April.

Bank Initiates Own Redevelopment Plan

Southern California First National Bank groundbreaking, November 1, 1973 La Mesa Scout. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

contracted the services of one of San Diego's notable Modernist architects and artists, Russell Forester. Forester, a graduate of La Jolla High had begun his architectural career as a draftsman with local Modernist icon Lloyd Ruocco before opening his own architectural design office in 1948. After studying at the Chicago Institute of Design in 1950-51, where he was influenced by the work of Mies Van Der Rohe's International and New Bauhaus styling, he returned to San Diego. His early work was noted for these "Miesian"

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influences. In 1951 Forester got his most noted and prolific commission for Bob Peterson's Jack-In-The-Box drive-through restaurants. The first of these automobile-influenced "food dispensing" buildings being located at 63rd and El Cajon Boulevard. Forester would eventually design some 200 Jack-In-The-Box buildings for Peterson's Foodmaker Corporation.

Among Forester's voluminous and impressive portfolio of Modernist masterworks are the half dozen banks for Southern California First National Bank in the early 1970s. The first of these new buildings, which were expected "to establish a stronger systemwide identity" for the bank, being the Kearny Mesa branch on Clairemont Mesa Boulevard in 1971. Forester's modular bank design featured a pre-cast, sandblasted design to allow for size and floor variations depending on the specifics of the site. Subsequently the La Mesa branch was very similar to the Kearny Mesa building with a Contemporary style using wood and glass to make the building more approachable than the older austere but sturdy style banks. In addition, the La Mesa branch would include an open-air atrium to emphasize a connection with the indoor and outdoor landscaping along with bright purple, orange, red and blue interiors.



BANK ADOPTS NEW MODEL

Future offices of Southern California First National Bank will be patterned after this model designed by Russell Forester, architect. First of precast, sandblasted buildings is under construction at 7710 Clairemont Mesa Blvd. Modular design will permit size and floor plan variations while maintaining a "family resemblance." Basic forms can be used repeatedly in many different locations in bank's operating area.

Russell Forester model for Kearny Mesa Branch, similar to La Mesa branch design. San Diego Union, September 9, 1971. Author's collection.

The new Southern California First National Bank opened in May 1974. Ads noted the new branch's benefits of more free parking, drive-up lanes, faster service, and evening hours for the drive-throughs (kiosks open to 7:30pm!). (Many may not remember that "bankers hours" used to make banking a mid-day only event—this drive-up service being a precursor to the ATMs and 24 hour on-line banking we take for granted today).



Our new La Mesa office gives you more parking, faster service, and better times.

We've moved to 4771 Spring Street where we have more room to take care of our customers. The parking lot is five times bigger, and we've installed four drive-up lanes for faster banking from your car. We've also installed the latest hours—every Monday and Friday evening, our drive-ups will be open until 7:30. No other bank in La Mesa gives you such good times.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRST NATIONAL BANK 1ST

4771 Spring Street, La Mesa • Phone 294-4839

Opening Day, Southern California First National Bank, 4771 Spring Street, May 9, 1974 La Mesa Scout. La Mesa Historical Society Archives.

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Southern California First National Bank would merge with California First Bank of San Francisco in 1975. In 1988 California First acquired Union Bank of California and changed its name in 1996. The Union Bank in Casa de Oro is also a Russell Forester design that opened in 1975. Russell Forester would set aside his architectural practice in 1976 to focus on his artwork, which can be found in many of his buildings as well.

Adaptive Use for 4767 Palm

After Southern California First National moved into their new building at 4771 Spring Street, they leased out their old building. For a time San Diego County used the concrete-walled building for records storage. In the 1980s La Mesa Appliance rented out the building for their retail operations.

In the 2010s Randall Lamb engineering purchased the 4757-67 building. They undertook a well-done historic rehabilitation adaptive use project. The project providing the longstanding San Diego based engineering firm a new home while giving the beautiful and impressive 1942 building new life. In 2015 the Historical Society, along with our La Mesa Rotary Club partners recognized the building's important status with a historical photo plaque.



Randall Lamb Building, 4767 Palm Avenue, May 2020.

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Interconnected Histories

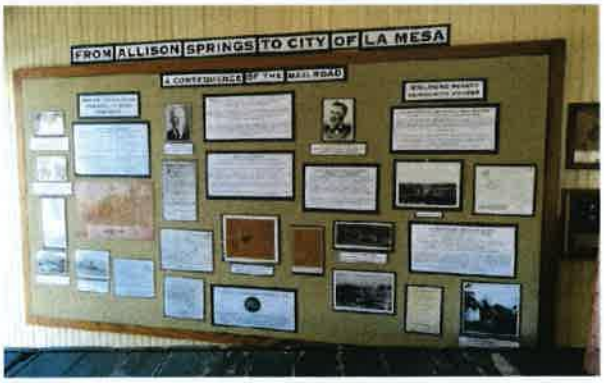
The individual histories of these three buildings and their commercial and retail tenants, aside from their tragic and shared demise, provide a fascinating view into the small-town character of downtown La Mesa's business and commercial histories. Although some observers may only have seen the destruction of two large national corporate bank branches, the origins of both of those two buildings and their tenants had ties as original local financial institutions as well as being works of notable San Diego commercial architecture.

The third building, Palm Avenue's First National Trust/Randall Lamb building not only was directly associated with its next home, the also destroyed Union Bank, but can trace its origins down the street to the 1927 Bank of Southern California. It was doubly painful to lose this classic La Mesa building, especially considering its impressive rehabilitation and re-vitalization by Randall Lamb engineering for a new and successful reuse. Hopefully this short history of how each of these buildings' integrated local pedigree, both in association with long-standing businesses and other existing sites and buildings in our local downtown, will remind us all of how such losses to our collective historical landscapes can be more community-wide than they may initially appear. We can also only hope that whatever comes next for these parcels can have a similar imprint and impact for La Mesa's future.

James D. Newland
La Mesa Historical Society

New Exhibit at La Mesa Depot

The San Diego Railroad Museum reached out last year to the Historical Society for developing a new long-standing exhibit on La Mesa history for their La Mesa Depot Museum. President/ Historian Jim Newland worked with SDRM's Donna Spevack on the new exhibit From Allison Springs to City of La Mesa: A Consequence of the Railroad. It was installed in July. The SDRM hopes to reopen for visitors in September on Saturdays from 1 to 4pm. Check out their website for updated information: https://www.psrm.org/visitor-information/la-mesa-depot/



New LMHS Exhibit in La Mesa Depot Baggage Room

La Mesa Historical Society
Reverend Henry A. McKinney House 1908

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The La Mesa Historical Society is an all-volunteer non-profit 501c3 corporation charged with preserving the history of the greater La Mesa area. The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 House Museum and the Historical Society Archives Research Facility located at 8369 University Avenue in La Mesa, California.

The ***Lookout Avenue*** is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society. Closing dates for submitting contributions are the 1st of every March, June, September, and December. Word document and jpeg image files preferred.

Submit contributions via email, or email the Editor at info@lamesahistory.com