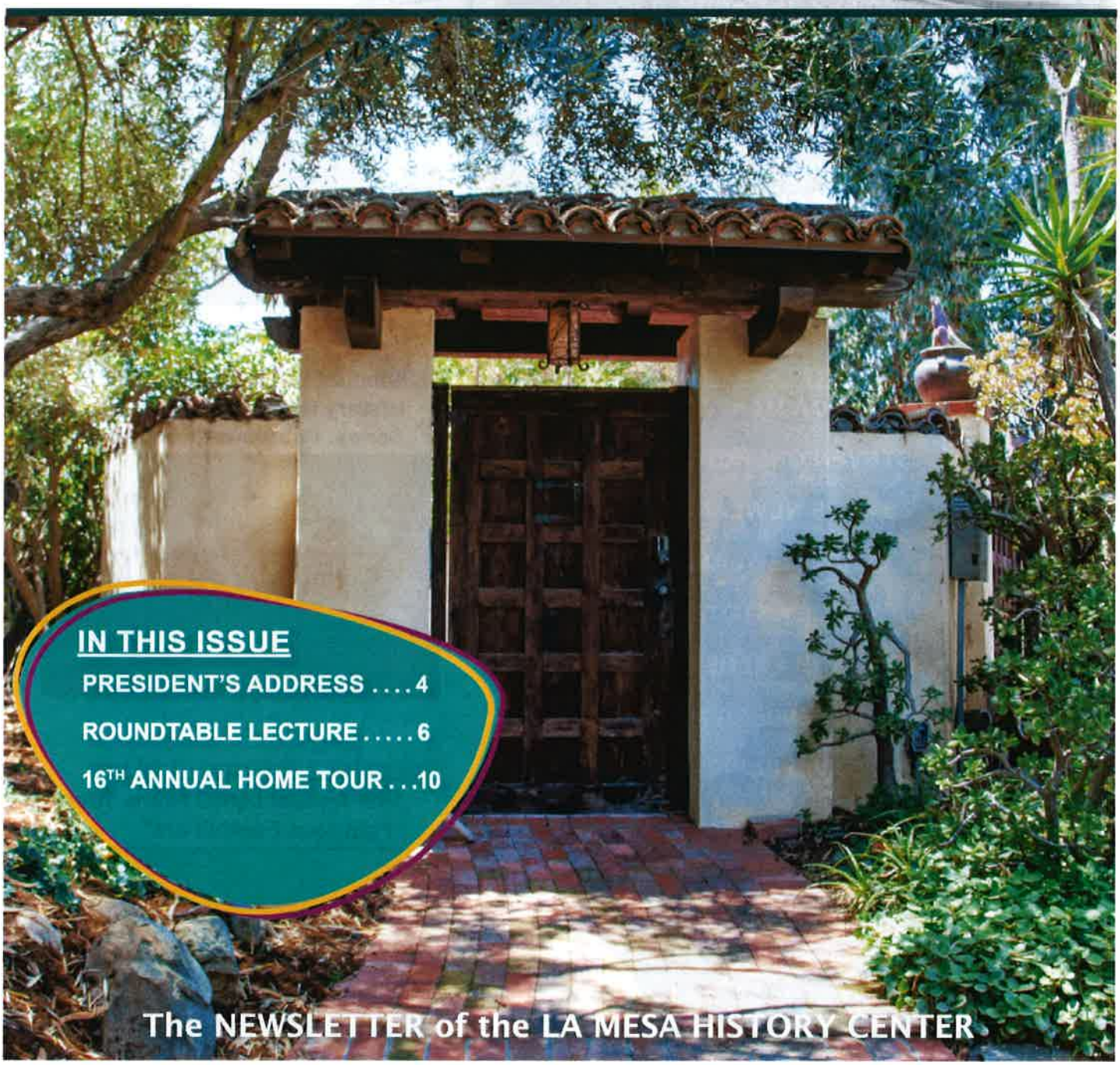
Fall 2022

lookout avenue





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The NEWSLETTER of the LA MESA HISTORY CENTER

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September 30

"Leave Your Mark" Landscape Bricks: Last Day to Donate



October 20 (6:30 pm - 8:30 pm)

History Roundtable Lecture Series: Fabulous "Foothill-ers"



November 5 (9:00 am - 3:00 pm)

16th Annual LMHC Home Tour: "Fabulous Foothill-ers"



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AT THE McKinney House

Several "Meet Me at the McKinney House" events were held this Spring. Including one that featured a downtown walking tour from historian Jim Newland that was part of La Mesa's participation in the OH San Diego event sponsored by the San Diego Architectural Foundation in March. In addition the McKinney House was also part of a site tour associated with the American Planning Association Conference in San Diego in May.

One of the most rewarding events was the first "school group" tour of the McKinney House in many years. Thanks to Board Member Samantha Alperts and docent Karen Kill students from the La Mesa Methodist Church Summer School were treated to a special tour with fun educational activities. The students thanked our dedicated volunteer educators with this poster.



La Mesa summer camp school tours the McKinney

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Normal patterns returning to the La Mesa History Center

It is with no small trepidation that I undertake to write my first President's Address for the Lookout Avenue newsletter. Stepping into this position following several years of strong and focused leadership by Jim Newland is a daunting proposition. However, I am grateful for his continued participation with the La Mesa History Center (LMHC), as well as the expertise and guidance from the other members of our Board of Directors. The Board is a truly dedicated and talented group of people who are committed to preserving the history of the Greater La Mesa community, and I am indebted to them for their service.

Normal patterns are re-emerging for the LMHC. Each Saturday from 1pm to 4pm you can find a core group of volunteers working in the archives. Through their efforts, we are gaining greater control over our photographic collections and will be able to provide quicker access to the immense holdings of prints, slides, and negatives depicting the people and places of the Greater La Mesa area. Volunteers are also enhancing our reference files and map collections. These invaluable resources are frequently used by researchers coming in to learn more about the history of their properties. Are you looking for opportunities to become involved in the activities of the archives and McKinney House? There are several openings for McKinney House docents that we are looking to fill. Stop by on a Saturday afternoon to learn more about becoming a docent or reach out to info@lamesahistory.com for more information.

In addition to our volunteers, the LMHC is excited to welcome back interns from San Diego State University. Whether they are focused on updating cataloging records for our collections, creating and promoting events and exhibits, or working to grow our historic properties registry, interns provide a welcome spark of enthusiasm to the work of the LMHC as they gain hands-on experience for their future careers.

Work also continues on the landscaping of our site. The "Buy A Brick" program is wrapping up in September, so don't miss your opportunity to add your name to the pathway bricks. Despite delays for a new sign in the area at the corner of University Avenue and Pine Street, progress has been made on the memorial rose garden and a new bench has been installed on the site. For all the details on the landscape project, check out Tracey Stotz's article on the topic.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates our slow return to normal routines then the resumption of the

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in-person home tour. Scheduled for Saturday, November 5, 2022, this is the cornerstone event for the LMHC which allows us to connect with a wide cross-section of the community. This year's tour is focused on the Brier tract, and Fletcher and Grossmont Hills, with the tour kicking off from the Grossmont Union High School District historic building on Murray Drive. Sponsorship opportunities are still available, and we are still looking for additional volunteers to assist on the day of the event. Don't forget that two tickets to the home tour are included at the Patron Membership level, so if your membership is up for renewal in the next few weeks, consider renewing at this level to take advantage of this added perk.

Finally, I will close this first address with a "thank you" to you, the membership of the LMHC. Your generosity and support over the past few years has allowed the organization to thrive despite difficult circumstances. When other small organizations have had to cut back or close, we have been able to keep moving forward, not only with a substantial landscape project, but also with our research and preservation activities. That continued momentum is 100% because of our wonderful membership, and I sincerely thank you for your continued support.

Veronica Martzahl

Veronica Martzahl
LMHC President
2022-2023

LA MESA
History Center

THANKS
YOU!

HISTORY ROUNDTABLE LECTURE SERIES

Fabulous "Foothill-ers"

Featuring Brier Tract, Mt Helix & Grossmont Hills

La Mesa History Center invites all to learn more about the architectural and artistic heritage of the century-old Grossmont High School and its surrounding neighborhoods.

The La Mesa History Center provides historic context and insight into the centennial of Grossmont High and the art and architectural heritage of its surrounding neighborhoods in preparation of the November 5th La Mesa History Center Home Tour, featuring the work of legendary architects Cliff May, Harry Hayden Whiteley, and Lloyd Ruocco.

WHAT: **La Mesa History Center History Roundtable Lecture Series**
Presentations and Discussion with historians
Topic: Fabulous "Foothill-ers" Tour featured,
and Lost Art & Architectural Heritage of La Mesa Knolls.

WHEN: **Thursday October 20, 2022 (6:30pm to 8:30pm)**

WHERE: **Grossmont Healthcare District Auditorium 9001 Wakarusa Street**
(next to Briercrest Park)

WHO: James Newland: historian and author of "Around Mt. Helix"
Todd Pitman: landscape architect & Lloyd Ruocco historian
Dave Hampton: post-war San Diego visual art & architecture historian

PRICES: **Free for LMHS Members $5 donation requested from Non-Members**
EVENT INFO: Call 619-466-0197, or email to: info@lamesahistory.comv

"History Roundtable Lecture" Continued on Page 7

"History Roundtable Lecture" Continued from Page 6

Come hear, learn and participate in a program featuring the heritage of Grossmont's century-old High School "castle", and its surrounding "foothill" communities architectural heritage reflected in this year's tour, including the story of the long-gone La Mesa Knolls neighborhood that featured noted local architect Lloyd Ruocco's seminal work. LMHC historian Jim Newland will master the ceremonies and present on the school and communities' development and architectural heritage. Newland will then join Lloyd Ruocco historian Todd Pitman and San Diego art and architectural historian Dave Hampton for a Q&A on the art and architecture of the area. Audience members will also be able to query and speak with these scholars. Don't miss this historic opportunity to hear, learn and experience more about Greater La Mesa's unique design heritage.



Scott Residence, 2022 Home Tour participant, Image: La Mesa History Center

LANDSCAPE PROJECT IS STALLED WAITING FOR SIGN APPROVAL

Last Call for 'BUY A BRICK' in Support of Project

The dirt patch at the corner of University Avenue and Pine Street is earmarked for the next piece of the landscape plan – the La Mesa History Center sign. "Unfortunately it is taking far longer than we anticipated to get city approval for our sign," said landscape project chair Tracey Stotz. "Plans were submitted four months ago and we are still trying to get a final okay." Once that is approved the sign will be installed and the bed around the sign will be finished off.

Also on the short list is the donor sign for the memorial rose garden. As part of the landscape renovation, the rose garden was expanded and moved out to the front of the house sopassersby can enjoy the lovely roses. The old picket fence was removed and new trellis fencing added. Cecile Brunner roses are trained up the trellis. Additional fragrant roses, in a palette of pinks, have been planted between the sidewalk to the house and the trellis. A brick path leads to a new bench in the garden that allows guests to stop and smell the roses as well as gaze at the McKinney House Museum. Kew Garden roses have been planted along the street to give anod to the Cherokee roses that once lined University Avenue. These small-thorned white rosesecho the Cherokee roses but serve as a safer choice for pedestrian traffic.

A gorgeous custom bench, made by local artist Brian Pederson from the enormous 100-year-old Monterey Pine that originally shaded the property, is installed in the landscape overlooking a young pine tree.

Still on the horizon are interpretive signage throughout the site, a shade ramada in the side yard, a display case for large collection items back by the archives building and rolling planters in the backyard.

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"Landscape Project" Continued from Page 8

"To say this was a group effort is an understatement," said Stotz. From the many individuals who purchased landscape bricks or made large donations (Anonymous, Rotary Club, Castros and more) to the in-kind support provided by RCP Brick and Block, and La Mesa Lumber there were at least 100 donors. Physical labor was provided by Israel Marquez's team at Marquez Lopez Landscape as well as volunteers.

Donors will have one last chance to purchase Inscribed landscape bricks for a $100 donation. After September 30 that specific funding project will end. Go to the website, lamesahistory.com, and click under Donate then Annual Capital Campaign Funding to purchase a brick. You can also stop by the Archives on Saturdays between 1 pm and 4 pm and purchase a brick in person. "The bricks are a great way to leave your mark on La Mesa while helping us get this project done," added Stotz.



McKinney House Museum

16TH ANNUAL LA MESA HISTORY CENTER HOME TOUR: FABULOUS FOOTHILL-ERS

La Mesa History Center invite all back for In-Person Home Tour Featuring Our Eclectic Architectural Heritage November 5th

"Fabulous Foothill-ers" Home Tour

Featuring Brier Tract, Mt. Helix & Grossmont Hills neighborhoods

The La Mesa History Center Home Tour enters its 16th year--having earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the most popular and satisfying home tours in the county. This year we return to an in-person home tour centered on, and partnering with, the century old institutional landmark Grossmont High School (GHS), the GHS Museum, and its original "Castle" school building. Once again, the tour features an amazing mixture of Contemporary, Revival and Modern designs emblematic of our rural suburban "foothill" neighborhoods. The Society's last tour here in 2019 was an overwhelming success. This year promises to be another outstanding event highlighting these wonderful communities and their distinctive homes.



Home Tour participant, Image: La Mesa History Center

Century Old Institution Honored in 2022 Home Tour

In addition to partnering with the Grossmont High School in recognition of the centennial of their original, restored, "Castle" building (which opened in September 1922)—and which will be included in the tour, the Brier Tract, Grossmont, and Mt. Helix communities present a unique opportunity for realizing San Diego's distinctive suburban residential dreams. From the Brier

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Restored 1922 Grossmont High School, Image: La Mesa History Center

Tract and Grossmont's early 20th Century plans for creating rustic bohemian artist colonies of arts & crafts influenced organic residences, through the popular "revival" styles homes of the inter-war years or the Post-War Mid-Century Modern and Contemporary style visions of "nuclear family" nirvana—this year's tour provides an invitation into this local architectural heritage—and some of the area's most noted builders and architects.

For these 20th century home makers and builders, the rocky, hillside view lots provided a natural canvas for California's legendary indoor-outdoor lifestyle. Tapping into that intersection of organic architecture, historic precedent and Arts and Crafts aesthetic made logical sense in fulfilling the rural suburban dreams of these varied periods of community development. Visionary designers and builders of San Diego found design palettes, and willing clients, here in Brier Tract, Grossmont, and Mt. Helix.

Back to the Future into the Rural Suburban Landscape

The History Center has arranged for tour guests to experience another group of captivating and breath-taking residential homes and landscapes to share with tour ticketholders. The tour features a range of properties from Theodore Kistner's 1922 Grossmont High School (built from local quarried granite), a pristine 1950 Modern "ranch house" for local contractor/developer Stanley Scott's family, an exquisite 1952 example of local Modernist architect Lloyd Ruocco, one of the original Cliff May 1935 "Spanish Rancheria" ranch homes—with an amazing and compatible 1960s Ruocco update, a 1950 custom view home by noted LA/Las Vegas architect Harry Hayden Whiteley, as well as an excellent owner-designed custom Contemporary-style Mt. Helix gem from 1977.

These homes, although well-preserved examples of distinctive periods and styles, are illustrative of how such well-designed and constructed houses continue to serve as family homes—and not just architectural artifacts. Although tastefully and compatibly period furnished and landscaped, they continue to provide the current owners, several with young children, the same functions and assets that the original owners experienced for these many generations.

Around Grossmont High, a Foothiller and foothill Neighborhoods History

Grossmont High has been a community institutional asset for over 100 years. Grossmont Union High School District dates to 1920. It was formed through the merger of the two small rural high schools (the original) El Cajon Valley High, established in 1893, and located in Bostonia, and

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Lakeside's Riverview High, established in 1916. It was the long wished for answer in providing secondary educational opportunities for East County residents from La Mesa Heights (today's College Area neighborhoods) east to Alpine.



Grossmont High School, Image: La Mesa History Center

Upon the District's formation, local community leader and Grossmont developer Col. Ed Fletcher stepped up. He offered property in his partner James Murray's Murray Hill tract for the school site at the centrally located Grossmont Pass. Here students could access the school via the state highway (which became US 80 in 1926) and the San Diego & Cuyamaca Eastern Railroad (now the MTDB trolley line). Fletcher also offered up stone from the quarries on his Grossmont Park tracts (the quarry being located roughly where the slow lanes of Interstate 8 are today) for the construction of the new school building. One hundred years ago this September the school (which had held classes at the Riverview campus for two years) moved into their new stone "castle" building. From here Grossmont "Foothillers," as their school nickname invokes, providing a clear description of the then rural, native topography and its residents. Volunteers from the Grossmont High School Museum and staff will be providing tours of the century-old "Castle" to tour ticket holders. Displays and presentations will also be held at that location.

El Cajon Heights to Alta Ranch

The stately granite-block regional high school, the only campus in the District until 1952, sat prominently overlooking the El Cajon Valley to the east and La Mesa to the west (the campus still being located within both cities today). The first attempts at development of this prominent land on the north side of the pass was with El Cajon pioneer Charles Johnson (Johnson Street in El Cajon). . Johnson's El Cajon Vineyard Company subdivided it as El Cajon Heights in 1889. Although it was never built out, original streets including Water Street (following the flume line) and Cuyamaca Street remain in our landscape today.



Image: La Mesa History Center

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Shortly after, Parke-Davis pharmaceutical company owner Hervey Parke purchased the El Cajon Heights and additional lands, renaming it his Alta Ranch and building a large home and barn next to the spring-fed pond that is now in the backyard of the Anthony's Restaurant. Parke passed away in 1899, leading to the purchase of these former Alta Ranch lands by an owner with an eye to a more suburban use of the land.

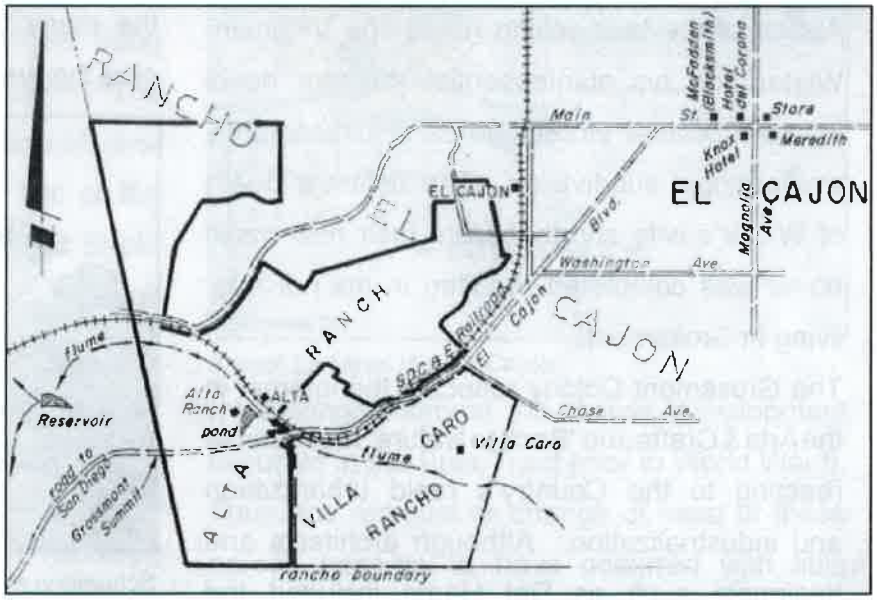


Parke's Alta Ranch, c1897 Image: La Mesa History Center

Fletcher's Grossmont and Murray Hill

San Diego merchant, promoter and entrepreneurial developer Ed Fletcher provided the area its initial suburban vision. In 1903 Fletcher partnered with former New York actor and agent William Gross to purchase much of the former Alta and Villa Caro ranches that straddled the pass from the Mesa into El Cajon Valley. In 1906 Fletcher and Gross subdivided these lands into hillside lots of the tract they named Grossmont. Fletcher then partnered with Montana cattle baron James Murray to purchase the failed San Diego Flume Company and much of the land north of the pass (later Fletcher Hills) in 1910. They quickly re-subdivided the property north the pass as Murray Hills (this included the new Murray Hill, later Grossmont, Reservoir that is now under Griffen Park). Renamed the Cuyamaca Water Company, Fletcher now had access to a most important resource for his land dreams—water.

As such Fletcher and Gross re-subdivided their Grossmont tract as well in 1910 and began to market it as a burgeoning bohemian artist colony. With Gross' entertainment connections soon notable artists and entertainers of the day such as John Vance Chaney, Teresa Careno and Carry Jacobs Bond had purchased lots and promised to build



Alta and Villa Caro Ranch Map, Guy Collection, Image: La Mesa History Center

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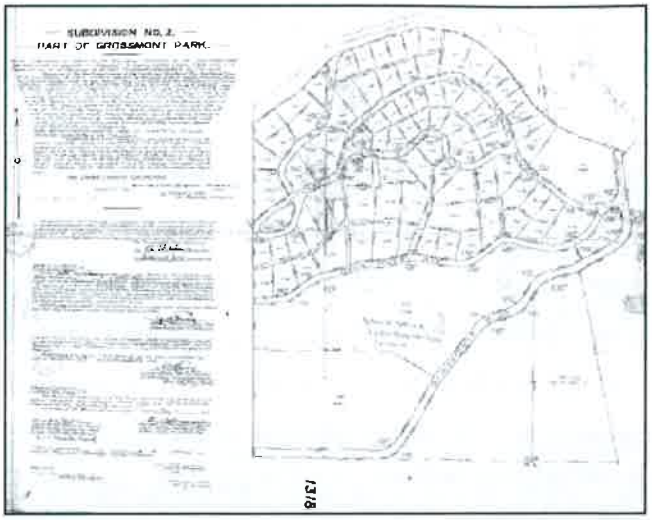
"16th Annual Home Tour" Continued from Page 13



Murry Hill Subdivision, 1911 Image: La Mesa History Center

homes and reside in the new colony. In 1912 world famous opera singer Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink constructed her home in the tract and took up residence at Grossmont. Schumann-Heink's commitment was soon buoyed with the announcement of author Owen Wister's purchase and construction of a home. Author of the best-selling novel The Virginian, Wister and his quintessential Western novel inspired several street names in Grossmont's westernmost subdivision. (The untimely death of Wister's wife shortly before their new rustic home was completed resulted in his not ever living in Grossmont).

The Grossmont Colony reflected the interest in the Arts & Crafts and "Back to Nature" movements reacting to the Country's rapid urbanization and industrialization. Although architects and designers such as Del Harris included the latest in Prairie School influence (the Modern



Grossmont Park Subdivision No.2 Map, 1910. Owen Wister Influenced Streets Names. Image: La Mesa History Center

styles of the time) into Schumann-Heink's quarried native-stone walled home, the Arts & Crafts influence resulted in a variety of rustic-style cottages and homes for Grossmont. San Diego architect Emmor Brooke Weaver being one whose arts & crafts stylings in Grossmont reflected the reliance on natural materials such as redwood lumber and local stone sited around the many boulders and granite outcrops that give the area its unique home settings.



Schumann-Heink House, c1913, Del Harris Architect, Image: La Mesa History Center

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Greossmont Inn, c1913. Emmor Brooke Weaver Architect, Image: La Mesa History Center

Brier Tract Joins the Suburban Trend with a Native American Theme

Just west of Murray Hill several investors financed by the Union Title and Trust Company joined in on the growing suburbanizing trend to plat out the Brier Tract in 1912. The property reached from the western end of the Murray Hill tract up to the flume company's Eucalyptus Reservoir (now site of Briercrest Park). In an ode to the period, all the street names platted had Native American associations from that period. Several names were referenced from the noted American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1855 "The Song of Hiawatha," a twenty-two-part epic poem. The remaining names also had connections to several Midwestern tribes. Interestingly only two of the original street names remain--Wakarusa Street (reportedly meaning "knee-deep in mud") of which there are namesake towns in both Kansas and Indiana; and Nokomis, one of the characters from Longfellow's poem with Ojibwe tribe origins.

Other original Brier Tract street names included a Hiawatha and Monona streets (both vacated), and a Minnehaha (now Briercrest), Nehoso (now Bramble), Yahara (now Brier) and Kegonsa (removed by later freeway expansions). Hiawatha and Minnehaha both being main characters of Longfellow's poem. The other streets Native American origins being: Yahara (name of river through Madison, Wisconsin—possibly meaning "catfish."); Nehoso (Osage for "clear water"—town in Missouri); Kegonsa (Winnebago for "Lake of Many Fishes"—town in Wisconsin) and Monona (also Winnebago for "beautiful"—also a Lake in Wisconsin).

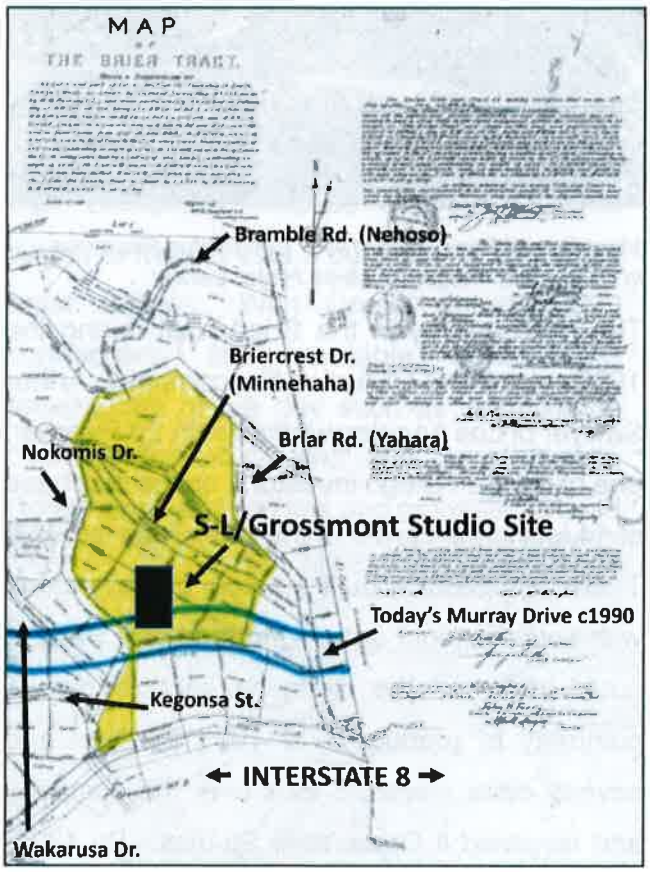


Image: La Mesa History Center

Interestingly, almost no home development occurred in the Brier Tract prior to World War II. Thus, the removal or change of most of these names appears to have occurred with little concern. Certainly, the interest of Americans

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with Native American history during this period was one that did not include the input of the Native people referenced, but it is one that reflects on the popularity of Longfellow's literary status and interest in Native American subjects.

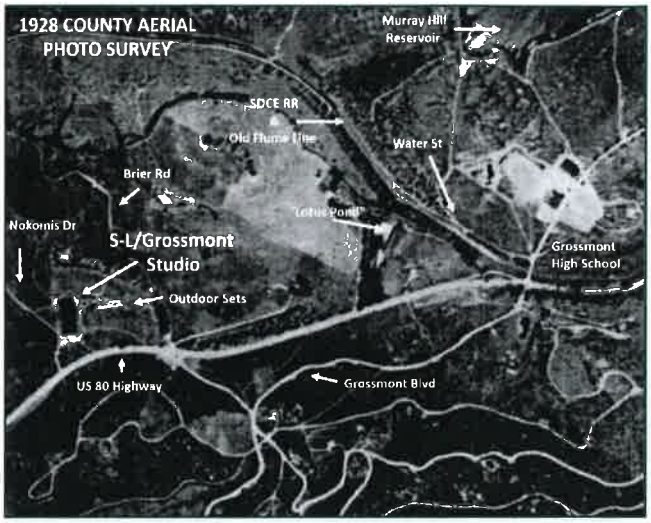


View toward Brier Tract c1922. Eucalyptus Reservior in center left, Image: La Mesa Histor Center

The main activity in the Brier Tract during the 1920s was the S-L Studios film company. Arthur Sawyer of Los Angeles worked with Ed Fletcher, one of the San Diego investors, on the purchase of 14 lots in the center of the Brier Tract in 1922. There, S-L Studios built a studio building along with some outdoor sets. Unfortunately, Sawyer could not get the fledgling motion picture company to produce. In 1925 Fletcher and several other investors took over the company and renamed it Grossmont Studios. By 1928, after completion of only a few pictures, it too stopped business. The studio building was adapted into a roadhouse and roller rink that ended when the building burned down in 1934. As noted, the Brier Tract sat relatively empty and undeveloped prior to WWII.



S-L Studios, 1922. Image: La Mesa History Center



1928 County Aerial Survey, Image: San Diego County

The Big Hill: Mt Helix is Opened

In 1916 Ed Fletcher partnered with several other investors (including lumberman Fred White and his wife Mary Yawkey White) to purchase much of the undeveloped property including, and surrounding, the higher Mt. Helix south of Grossmont. One year later Fletcher would allow the San Diego Advertising Company to use Mt. Helix for its version of Easter Sunrise services that had started several years earlier on La Mesa's Mt. Nebo. This would lead to the annual event that inspired Mary Yawkey and her brother lumber magnate Cyrus Yawkey to

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fund construction of the famous Richard Requa-designed Mt. Helix Nature Theater and park in their mother's honor that continues to hold that event to this day. The Nature Theater opening for Easter 1925. A tradition that continues to today. (The theater property is operated as a unique private-operated public park by the Mt. Helix Park Foundation).



1939 Easter Service Program, Image: La Mesa History Center

It was not until after World War I, in the 1920s and 1930s that the Mt. Helix area began to see significant development. A key supporter and catalyst for this was Fred Hansen. A Danish immigrant who had moved to Illinois at age 10, his early life read like a character in a Horatio Alger novel of successful rise from poor immigrant to wealthy businessman based on hard work and clean living! Working his way from salesman to executive, Hansen made a fortune in the cyclone (chain-link) fence business before moving to San Diego County in 1924. He chose this area as he noted there was "no spot so exactly suited for a country estate more than Mt. Helix." Part of his inspiration for converting the area into gentlemen's ranch estates was avocados. Starting in the late 1920s Hansen moved to make the once-mocked "alligator pear" into Mt. Helix's "green gold." His Avocado Villas and Calavo Gardens tracts (with its avocado variety street names) set the stage for development of 1920s and 1930s Mediterranean style home sites with their own avocado and citrus groves.



Hansen's Calavo Gardens brouchure, Image: La Mesa History Center

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Local Musician Turns World Renown Designer: An Original, Cliff May

This year's tour features a unique example of the Spanish/Mediterranean revival style homes so popular here in San Diego County, including Grossmont/Mt Helix, during the Interwar Years. It is a special example of world renown architectural designer Cliff May. Cliff May had grown up in Mission Hills. Visiting the historic adobe homes down the hill in Old Town as well as his aunt's adobe home at the Rancho Santa Margarita (now Camp Pendleton) would leave a lasting impression. When attending San Diego State College in the mid-1920s (it was still at its University Heights campus), May led a popular local dance band. His band played events from the Hotel del Coronado to El Cajon's then new Bostonia Ballroom. Yet, his girlfriend's father, Talmadge Park developer Guy Lichty, wasn't convinced that music was a proper profession for a son-in-law. May, who along with new wife Jean Lichty, then gave up the saxophone and began to pursue fabrication of custom "Old California" Monterey-style furniture. When some of that furniture inspired a Talmadge Park home lot buyer to ask if May could design a house to go with the furniture, Cliff's first design commission began.

May used his knowledge to craft a California version of the historic 19th century adobe ranch homes he felt so properly defined the indoor-outdoor lifestyle of Californians. He created two adaptable models for his mostly frame and stucco homes, California Rancherias and Haciendas.



THE SAN DIEGO UNION: SUNDAY MORNING, SEPT. 29, 1

Home and Garden

GROSSMONT HOME ON RANCHO STYLE; MAY IS BUILDER

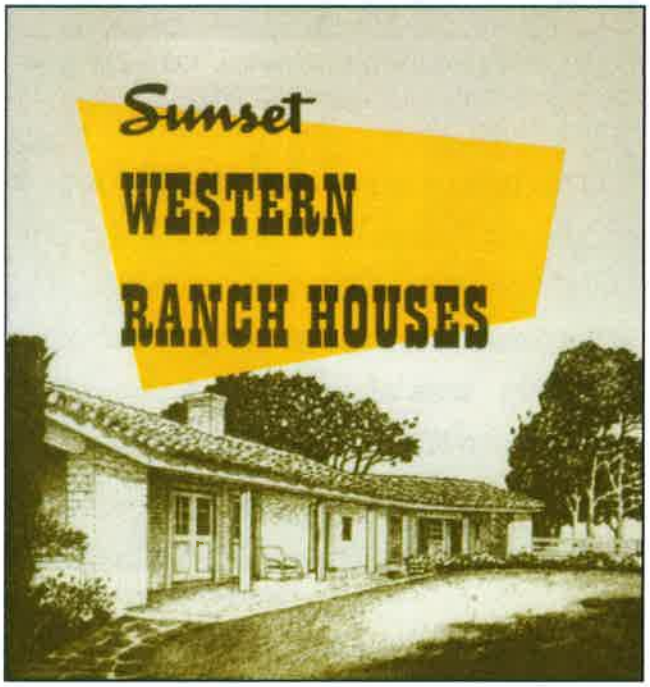
THIS ATTRACTIVE RANCHO HOME BEING BUILT ON GROSSMONT

San Diego Union September 29, 1935. Image: Author's Collection

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Both borrowed liberally from the historic precedents of May's youth. His first Talmadge Park home was completed in early 1933, and his second garnered significant attention when published in Architectural Digest magazine later that year. May would design and build roughly forty of these houses in San Diego before moving permanently to Los Angeles in 1938. His Post-WWII affiliation with Sunset Magazine and its publication of his 1946 book on California Ranch Houses being a catalyst for establishing and promoting the "ranch house" as the prototype for suburban homes—no matter the style. As such scholars estimate that May's attributions include over 1,000 custom designed homes/buildings with another 18,000 tract houses. Over his career May's influence is credited not only through California and the West, but the East Coast, Caribbean, Mexico, Australia, Ireland and Switzerland.



Cover Cliff May's 1946 book

This year's tour features one of Cliff May's original Rancheria models. Built in 1935 in Grossmont, the Grosse/Bos House is a wonderfully preserved version of Cliff's early work. In addition, the second owner's recognition of their unique architectural gem led them to work with one of San Diego's leading architects for a mid-1960s remodel—Lloyd Ruocco. The current owners getting the home listed as a County Historical Landmark last year.


Let this Cliff May "Rancheria" on Scenic Grossmont Inspire You to Better Living

Open for Your Inspection
Sunday, January 19th . . . . 1 P. M. to 5 P. M.

How to Go..

Important Features
- Seven Rooms
- Four Bedrooms
- Gas Furnace
- Oak & Tile Floors
- Lot 140x150 feet
- Spectacular View
- No city taxes to pay
- Fully Landscaped
- Sprinkler System
- Copper Pipes

This Home Can Be Purchased for..
$3150 Down
. . terms $49 per month with a U. S. Government Loan . . .

CLIFF MAY
BUILDER OF HACIENDAS and EARLY CALIFORNIA RANCHERIAS

San Diego Union November xx, 193X, Image: Author's Collection

La Mesa Knolls – Lost Local Neighborhood and Lost Ruocco Heritage

For those who have been on our tours before, or know about our area's architectural heritage, the name Lloyd Ruocco will be familiar. Ruocco is considered by many to be a leader of the San Diego Modernist movement. Along with his wife Ilse Hamann Ruocco, a professor of

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art at San Diego State, they would establish the Design Center studio on Fifth Avenue in 1949, and be leaders, mentors, and inspiration for a generation of Modernist artists and architects.



Ruocco's Il Cavo home, c1945. Pitman Collection

Lloyd and Ilse's first house, Il Cavo, was built in the La Mesa Knolls tract in 1945. Il Cavo being a great example of Ruocco's organic-influenced Modernist designs. Ruocco also designed several other homes in the small tract that was located adjacent to the Brier Tract. La Mesa Knolls had two main streets, an extension of the Brier Tract's Kegonsa Street, and Lakewood Drive (the lake being Eucalyptus Reservoir—now Briercrest Park). Unfortunately, the entire La Mesa Knolls subdivision along with most of the southern half of the Brier Tract subdivision are gone today. Expansions of the US 80/ Interstate 8 to the north and the construction of the SR125/I8 interchange to the west required the removal of these areas—and all the homes.



La Mesa Knolls Subdivison, 1937, Image: La Mesa History Center



US 80, SR 67 (now 125) Interchange, 1957. LM Knolls neighborhood in upper left, Image: La Mesa History Center

[NOTE: To learn more about La Mesa Knolls, its homes and Ruocco heritage, please attend the LMHC Roundtable Lecture on October 20, 2022, at the Grossmont Healthcare District Auditorium at 6:30pm. More information on the Roundtable can be found on page 6 in this newsletter.]

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Mid-Century Modern Home Community

World War II transformed San Diego County, including the Brier/Fletcher Hills and Grossmont/ Mt. Helix areas with exponential suburban growth that continued into the Post-War era. Both areas promised an amazing and unique version of the American Dream. Those dreaming of the perfect home for raising a baby-booming nuclear family in the California suburbs, the indoor-outdoor lifestyle inspired by the intersection of organic architecture, regional historical character, and Arts & Crafts sensibilities made sense amongst the granite-filled lots of Brier Tract, Grossmont and Mt. Helix. Available lots and a young generation of professionals and home seekers found the semirural landscape perfect for their suburban dreams. Visionary architects such as the aforementioned Lloyd Ruocco, Homer Delanie, John Mock and Henry Hester and other practitioners of San Diego's Modernist design community found palettes and willing clients. Soon hundreds of Mid-Century Ranch, Contemporary and Modern homes were filling empty lots and former orchard plots.



Ruocco's Lillie House. Pitman Collection

This year's tour features several excellent examples of Mid-Century architecture. One is a Lloyd Ruocco custom home located in the Brier Tract. The 1952 Cole Residence is exquisitely preserved and a listed City Historical Landmark. It has also undergone a wonderful landscape update and shows another of Ruocco's wonderful balance of organic materials in a Modern skin.

Another is a stunning Modern ranch house built in the Brier Tract in 1950 for local builder and civic leader Stanley Scott. Scott had recently joined with partner Marvin Jackson to form the Jackson & Scott Development Company, whose offices were built across the highway in the Grossmont commercial complex. Although Jackson & Scott did gorgeous custom homes such as this one for its owner, it was one of the first companies to build prefabricated tract homes, including in the Rolando, Redwood Village and Oak Park communities prior to more well-known communities such as Clairemont (1951) and Allied Gardens (1953). Jackson & Scott's largest and most notable community project being Del Cerro (1955).

The Stanley Scott home has excellent integrity of materials and design. Wrapped around a built-in pool it is an outstanding example of cutting-edge custom ranch house design of the time. Luckily all three owners recognized the significance of the design and made almost no changes over the years. The new (fourth) owners have recently got the home listed on the City's Historical Register.

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Other noted architects also found the Grossmont/ Mt Helix area to be a palette for custom design. One of those being an architect better known in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, whose eight-year stay in San Diego is less recognized--Harry Hayden Whiteley. Whitely had earned his architectural reputation working in Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s, alongside noted practitioners such as Paul Revere Williams, Frank Taylor and Adrien Wilson. His work in Los Angeles including large Beverly Hills mansions in Spanish and Italian Revival styles, as well as hotels and commercial buildings.

During WWII Whiteley moved to San Diego to join in on the large amount of wartime work. During his time here, he became an officer in the San Diego AIA branch and he and his wife became involved in civic and community service projects. His most notable San Diego project being one of the large exhibit buildings at the Del Mar Fair Grounds (1949). In 1951 he and his wife relocated to Las Vegas where he was involved in many high-profile projects during the City's 1950s and 1960s development boom until his death in 1970 at age 80.

In 1949 D.R. "Ray" Grable, real estate developer, and son of the pioneering La Mesa developer and promoter Sherman Grable (Park-Grable Company) hired Whiteley to build his family a custom home on a 270-degree view lot on Mt. Helix. Whiteley perfectly-sited this home on its lot, ensuring that all rooms of the original house took advantage of the unprecedented views. The house features "high end custom details" such as the hidden cocktail bar and curvilinear accordion-room divider and built-ins still recall the exclusive period nature of this design. The house also is wonderfully landscaped around a large built-in swimming pool and the current owners' menagerie of pets and farm critters—all reflective of the large, rural unincorporated lot. As one of the few documented examples of Whiteley's work here in San Diego, and its association with a long-standing La Mesa family make it a not-to-miss addition to our tour.

We also feature our youngest home to grace our tour participants. This is a custom 1977 Contemporary style home built for award-winning orthopedic surgeon and Alvarado Hospital pioneer Dr. Thomas Peterson. Dr. Peterson designed the home on another large Mt. Helix view lot he had purchased some years prior to construction for his family, including his wife Mary and four children. He worked with architect Joe Lewis Wilkins to complete the drawings and get the home permitted. The home includes a large master suite with sauna room, and four distinctive rooms for their two sons and two daughters. It also has a unique loft level, serving as a second office, guest room and additional children's play area. Originally it also included space for a "shop" where Peterson worked with his medical technicians in building and testing his ground-breaking artificial joints and other medical innovations. The property

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also includes stunning views to both the east and west, wrap-around view decks, patios, a tennis court, swimming pool, guest/pool house, hiking trails and circular drive. Another not to miss suburban estate.

Hope to See You On the Tour!

Once again, we thank our generous homeowners for opening these Greater La Mesa area gems to in-person tour guests. This year's tour looks to be another memorable event. Don't miss it!

Get Your Tickets Now!

James D. Newland, LMHC

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For more information contact Vice President Tracey Stotz at (619) 200-0918

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The ***Lookout Avenue*** is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa History Center. 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