

La Mesa Historical Society

LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 39, Issue 4

Winter 2014

# President's Address

## Jim Newland

## LMHS President

It has been quite an interesting late summer with unseasonable (if you consider our climate to include seasons) weather. Hopefully you have kept relatively cool and were able to avoid some of the extreme wind episodes in September.

One Society event that beat the heat was another of our Photo History Demonstration Days. This partnership with Grossmont Community College's Photography program brought over 90 GCC students to the McKinney House and archives on September 13th. Thanks to Board Member and GCC professor Suda House, our tin-type photography demonstrators, docents and volunteers for once again making the Society a "cool" place to visit and learn.

The Fall of course brings our big LMHS event—the annual Home Tour. Make sure you set aside Saturday November 1st for this year's event. We will return to the Grossmont area for this year's tour, featuring five amazing houses from classic revival to mid-century Modern masterpieces.

Due to the narrow, rural scale roads and relatively non-existent street parking in the historic Grossmont Colony neighborhood, we are requiring everyone to take the free Old Town Trolley shuttle buses that come with ticket admission to access the homes this year. Make sure you take advantage of this great opportunity to see these beautiful and fascinating homes.

Most of you probably know, and have experienced, that our wonderful old style downtown "village" district is receiving a long-needed facelift—with new sidewalks, lighting and landscaping. This project presents a déjà vu to thirty-five years ago when the current improvements that are now being replaced—went in. (You can read about that project in an article I wrote for the La Mesa Courier in September http://scoopsandiego.com/la_mesa_courier/columnists/the_historical_view/historical-view-village-improvements-a-s-d-j-vu/article_fe8c3f1e-2a4d-11e4-a062-0017a43b2370.html.)



Photo of 1979 "Village Improvements" project construction. These sidewalks are now being replaced 35 years later.

Although we look forward to the improvements, this construction time is very challenging for our downtown business colleagues—just as it was back then. Please don't let a bit of dust and debris keep

you from patronizing our historic village merchants, businesses, and events over the next year.

The Archives have also been a busy place over the last quarter. New collections feature information from the police department as well as the City donating some very early tax assessment records for us to archive. These records should prove helpful in researching historic properties.

Stop by the Archives and see what's new there, but also remember to mark out time for a visit to the McKinney House Museum during our Christmas Open House on Sunday December 14th.

Also be aware that even more improvements are planned for our Website: http://lamesahistoricalsociety.com. We soon hope to be able to offer you and the public the opportunity to renew your membership, make a donation, purchase event tickets, and publications directly from the site. Our Facebook site has also been re-activated. Make sure and "friend" us if you are active in the world of social media.

Have a great holiday season and always feel free to contact me directly to discuss any ideas you might have to help us continue our invaluable mission for preserving La Mesa's history.

## Calling All Literaries!

This will be my last issue as Editor of the Lookout. I am leaving to have a baby in January. We are looking for someone to take over the helm as Editor. If you like words and want to be more involved with our La Mesa Historical Society, email or call Aaron Landau for more details at bernieaaron@gmail.com or at (619) 244-2470.

***A Special Welcome for the Society's New Members***

Amy Sanders
Steven Churchill

## 9th Annual Home Tour

The 9th annual Home Tour is coming up on Saturday, November 1st from 10am to 3pm. We are featuring five fabulous homes in the Grossmont Hills area. Two homes are early stones houses designed by noted architect, Ernest Flagg and the others are beautifully decorated mid-century homes.

The tour starts at the La Mesa Women's Club on the corner of Grossmont Center Dr. and Wilson (across from Discount Tires). San Diego Trolley will again provide transportation for the tour.

You may pick up your reserved tickets, the map of the homes and tour program at the Will Call table and Tour Check-in at the shuttle center. Day of event tickets may also be purchased at that time.

Please call 619-466-0197 for ticket information and our website www.lamesahistory.com.

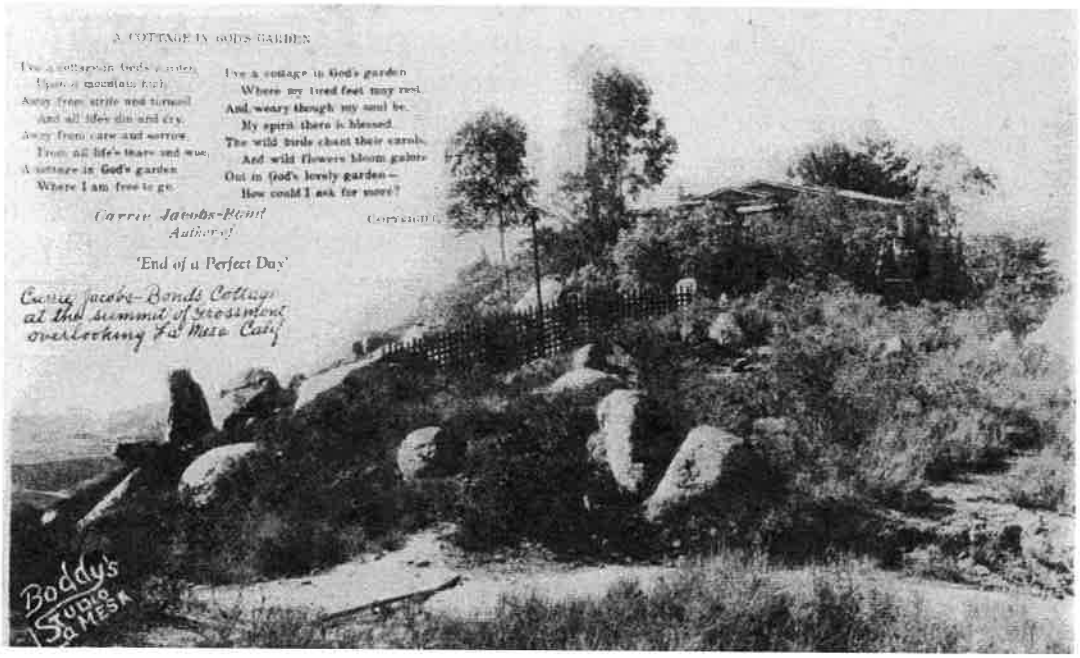
This is the key fundraiser for the Society and always a fun event. We hope that people in the community will support this year's home tour.



Photo of the Grossmont Inn, middle right and the recently graded streets of the Grossmont Colony, c1913. Join us as we tour five wonderful homes in this historic community.

## Win FREE tickets to this year's Home Tour

To enter, simply "like" our page on Facebook and "share" our post about the tour on your personal page. We will be announcing the winners on Facebook on Thursday, October 30th. Good luck!




See homes in what noted author Carrie Jacobs Bond called "God's Garden"—the Grossmont Colony--for the 2014 La Mesa Historic Home Tour.

## Upcoming Events

**Historic Home Tour** – Saturday, November 1st, 10 – 3pm

Check in and shuttle pick up at the La Mesa Women's Club, southwest corner of Grossmont Boulevard and Wilson Street.

**First Annual La Mesa Craft Beer and Wine Winter Festival** – Saturday, December 6th, 11am - 7pm

La Mesa Community Center, 4975 Memorial Drive
Society will receive a portion of the proceeds and have a booth at the event.
Advance Tickets $20, Day of Tickets $25

**Christmas Open House** – Sunday, December 14th, 2 – 4pm

8369 University Avenue (southeast corner of Pine Street), La Mesa.

**Archives** – Open Saturday 1 – 4pm

**McKinney House** – Open 2nd & 4th Saturday 1 – 4pm

Check our website www.lamesahistory.com for the latest on Society events.

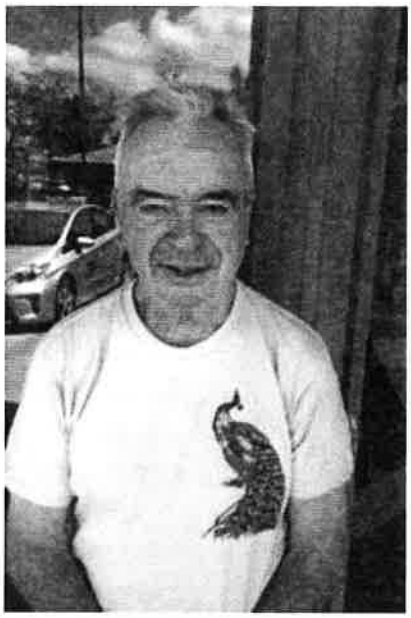
# In the Spotlight

## Jerry Lester: Compassion and Community

Jerry Lester is not a young man, but at 81 he is not an old man either. He is an engaged and committed community member who thinks and cares about helping others. That is in Jerry's nature.

Jerry's long life has been a journey. A personal journey full of conscious meaning. He was born in Wisconsin and raised in Minneapolis through high school. He was a "weather baby" who attended Pasadena City College. Then he headed to frostbite country again to get his B.S. in Pharmacy at North Dakota State in Fargo. He became a licensed pharmacist. He wanted more of an education so he received an M.A. in Public Administration at the University of Minnesota.

Subsequently Jerry had a varied and distinguished career from age 26 until he retired at age 50. He moved around a lot. As he tells in his own words he went with a job that kept increasing his salary. He admits it was all about the money. However, this writer feels that it was the adventure of trying new and different things as well. He was not married and with no wife and kids he could do just that.



Some of his jobs include one year in Kentucky where he worked for the United Mine Workers Union. Two years as a V.P. of Recruiting for the pharmacies of Kroger's supermarkets and was based in Cincinnati, their home for corporate offices. He loved that job the best. He was constantly on the road six days a week. He had an expense account so he could bank most all of his salary.

He worked in California from 1970-1978. He was a pharmacy inspector for the state of California, city of San Diego, and counties in Southern California. His territory in addition to San Diego County included Riverside, San Bernardino, and part of Orange County. He was responsible for all legal outlets of pharmaceuticals.

Since retirement, he has lived in San Diego, Rosarito, Mexico, and now La Mesa for the past ten years. While living in Mexico, a chance encounter with a Catholic priest, Father Henry, steered Jerry into the philanthropic part of his life for the past 44 years. Since 1970 Jerry has been involved personally and in recruiting others to support orphanages in Baja California. In 1970 Jerry established the Jerry Lester Foundation to do just that. He is involved in supporting 30 orphanages. He is especially proud of this work with improving the life of orphans.

Why is Jerry being featured in this newsletter "In the Spotlight"? In addition to his charitable work south of the border, he has become an active supporter of causes in La Mesa. Jerry is a big sponsor and supporter of the La Mesa Lookout Legacy Park Project, which will be located at the corner of Fourth Street and La Mesa Boulevard. It is a project, which got started in late 2009 to leave a public art legacy as part of La Mesa's 2012 Centennial. Jerry's support has been instrumental in getting this project fully funded. The artists, Jesse and Mary Lynn Dominguez were selected two years ago, the design has been created, and the funding is in place. The Lookout Legacy Park Project will be completed along with the city funded Streetscape Project. Target completion date for the Lookout Legacy project is 2015.

Jerry's hobbies include: watching sports, theater, and traveling. Theater is not just a hobby for Jerry. It is a philanthropic passion as well. He has sponsored four Theatre Arts scholarships at Grossmont College in perpetuity. He also happens to have created six other scholarships that he provides as well in perpetuity. Two in Culinary Arts, two in Criminal Justice, and two in Nursing.

Jerry wants young kids, especially of minority populations and of lower socioeconomic levels, to be exposed to theater that could become a lifelong passion. To promote his passion for the theater and to get kids to see a performance and to have transportation to and from, he pays for buses to take elementary school kids to see performances at three local theaters—the Cygnet, the Moxie, and the Old Globe. He has arranged for those theaters to provide the tickets while he pays for and secures the buses. Jerry would like to fill up as many as five buses, 50 students per, for a performance.

If that weren't enough, Jerry has funded Theater Arts students at Grossmont College to perform one-hour plays in 15 locations annually. The T.A. students come with costumes and sets as well as their lines.

**Jerry's Top Ten**
Movie: "Titanic"
Car: Volkswagen
Book: Friends of the Library Picks
Color: Blue
Food: Mexican
TV Show: "Real People"
Music: Classical
Place to Travel To: Rosarito, Mexico
Person You Would Love To Have Met: Jesus Christ
Pet Peeve: Complainers

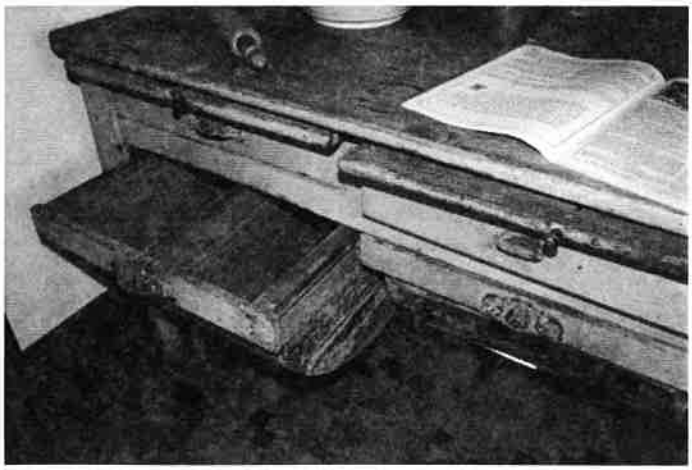
Words of Wisdom: "Continued health and happiness to you."

# ArtiFACTS!

## Possum-Belly Baker's Table

Tucked in to a corner of the kitchen is the Possum-Belly Baker's Table which, according to son, Donald McKinney, has been there as long as he could remember. Mrs. McKinney used to do her baking on this table. There are two drawers beneath the table that are rounded for easy scooping. They are made of tin to protect the contents from mice and other pests. These drawers are where families used to keep their flour, sugar, or cornmeal. Although we do not know where Mrs. McKinney got this table, the Sears and Roebuck catalogue from 1897 lists a nearly identical table $5.50. This would be a present day price of $150 to $200. Eventually the idea of this table would be expanded to include an upper cabinet, which in turn, would lead to the built-in kitchen cabinets we're now accustomed to.





# Collection Connection

We thank all of these donors individually and collectively.

| Donor | Donated Items |
|---|---|
| Becky Gauger | Six aerial photographs of La Mesa |
| Phyllis & Lee Bourdeau | Framed watercolor of the La Mesa Railroad Depot by local artist Robert Landry |
| Helix Water District | DVD – "Water District Centennial", History of Helix Water District. |

# Check out our Website!

We'd like to fill you in on some of the upcoming changes to the website and our online presence. We will be making it simple to pay membership dues online, register for events, and stay up-to-date on the latest information. You will also be able to make donations and shop for your favorite merchandise in the online store.

Board member, George Fahouris, and his team at DigiGriot are working diligently to have these improvements completed in the next month. Keep an eye out for these exciting new features!

Additionally, we invite you to follow us on Facebook for news, current events, photos of historic La Mesa, and ongoing fun contests!
https://www.facebook.com/LaMesaHistoricalSociety

We look forward to seeing you online!

# La Mesa through the Years

## McKinneys Due Home from South America

La Mesa friends are looking forward to the arrival about the 15th of this month of Mr. And Mrs. Cromwell H. McKinney, who have been in South and Central America for the last six years. Mrs. McKinney formerly was Miss Marie Maxwell, daughter of Mr.

And Mrs. W. I. Maxwell while her husband is a son of Rev. and Mrs. H. A. McKinney.

They are motoring across the continent from New York, where they arrived September 24 on the steamship Ancon from Cristobal, C.Z.

This will be their second trip home in 11 years. The first five years that they were away were spent in South America, most of the time at San Pedro in the Andes Mountains "50 miles from anywhere". Mr. McKinney studied the Indian language there, and served as a missionary for the American Bible society. Having had medical training in college he was doctor and dentist to the natives, as well as their teacher.

After their first furlough in the states, Mr. And Mrs. McKinney were sent to La Paz, Bolivia, but about a year and a half ago they were transferred to Cristobal, where Mr. McKinney has been in charge of the American Institute for the same society. He also served as an interpreter.

(Typed from the La Mesa Scout October 4, 1929 as written. The McKinney House built in 1908, the home in which Cromwell grew up, is the historical home of the La Mesa Historical Society purchased from the grandchildren of Reverend Henry and Florence McKinney.)

C.Z. is Canal Zone.

# Landmarked Homes of La Mesa

## "A Nod to the Todd House"

The Todd House on Vista Drive is important as one of the few homes in La Mesa showing the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Style. Wright advocated blending homes into the landscape, the use of earth tones, and central living spaces with rooms flowing into one another, features that can be seen in the Todd House.

The house was built into the hillside and has a large basement with a rock faced block wall exposed on the downhill side, a main floor living level, and also a tower with a second floor that is actually a room with views in all four directions.

The house has been restored on the exterior and looks today just as it did when first constructed in 1911. The Todd House was one of the five homes featured on the La Mesa Historical Society Seventh Annual Home Tour in November 2012.

Orien and his wife Mary Waterman Todd came to La Mesa in 1911 from Elgin, Illinois to seek alleviation for a health problem. In November 1911 they purchased Lots 12, 13, 14, and 15 in Block Q. Lookout Park from the Park-Grable Investment Company. According to the family, the grounds were landscaped by noted horticulturist Kate Sessions who is famous for her association with Balboa Park



Orien Todd House, Mt. Nebo. c1910s



Todd House, present day.

Mr. Todd owned several millinery (hat) stores in downtown San Diego. Mary Todd helped start La Mesa's first Easter Sunrise service in 1915 on Prospect Place near the Todd House. The Todds celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1947.

The Todd's had three children: two sons Harry and Orien Jr. and a daughter, Margaret. Orien Jr.was a prominent San Diego County athlete and held the Southern California championship in handball. He was president of the Andrews Sporting Good Company. Orien has been given the credit for helping bring the Chargers football team to San Diego. This house was the home of the Todd family from the time it was built until the death of Thelma Todd, Harry's wife, in 1984.

## Historic Photo Day

On Saturday, September 13th students from the Photography Program at Grossmont College visited the La Mesa Historical Society's Historic Photo Day by observing the making of 19th century tintypes on the lawn, touring the McKinney House and exploring the display of cameras and prints from the Society's collection in the Palmero Room.

Photographer Dave Smith with his three assistants, a large format camera and a portable darkroom, recreated classical turn of the century portraits of students dressed in vintage period clothing while using the McKinney Museum House as a backdrop.



The house was open for self-guided tours with docents available to answer any questions regarding life in the early 1900's. LMHS Board members, docents and GC faculty were available to answer questions about the photographs from all epochs, genres and processes as well as cameras and other tools from the 175 years of photography. Students took notes and asked questions about photography's importance in our social and cultural history.

The event was free for Grossmont College students, staff and faculty, LMHS members and the general public and approximately 100 people were in attendance for this bi-annual event.

Share story ideas, comments and suggestions with Editor Erin Ben-Judah at erin.benjudah@hotmail.com


### *Board of Directors*

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|---|---|
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**Board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at 7:00 PM.**







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www.lamesahistory.com

**Change Service Requested**

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Cut along line and mail the section below with your check.

## AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
### Membership Application

The Society depends on membership dues, bequests and fund-raising activities to support the restoration and preservation of local history.

The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 house/museum located at 8369 University Avenue (at the corner of Pine Street) in La Mesa. Open 1-4pm every second and fourth Saturday of the month or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call (619) 466-0197 for further information. Lookout Avenue is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society. Our address is:

La Mesa Historical Society
P.O. Box 882
La Mesa, CA 91944

Lookout Avenue was the original name of La Mesa Boulevard from the 1890s until the city council voted to change the name in 1940. Lookout Avenue was La Mesa's main street.

- ☐ $500 Benefactor
- ☐ $250 Patron
- ☐ $100 Sponsor/Organization
- ☐ $50 Sustaining
- ☐ $25 Family
- ☐ $20 Individual
- ☐ $10 Student

Name: _____

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I would like to be a volunteer in the following areas:

- ☐ Docent/Education
- ☐ Events
- ☐ Grounds Building
- ☐ Archives/House