



La Mesa Historical Society LOOKOUT AVENUE



Volume 21, Number 1

Summer 2000

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1st in a series...

Early Homes of La Mesa

The R. Bruce Carmichael House 9485 La Cuesta Drive - Mt. Helix

25th Anniversary Celebration and the Time Capsule

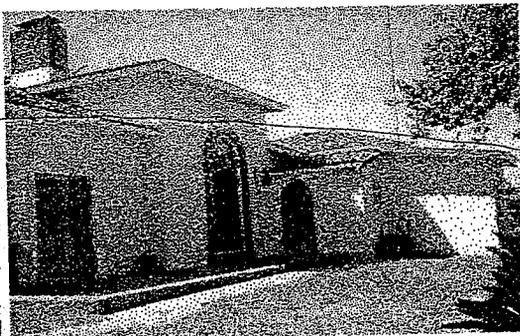
The La Mesa Historical Society will be celebrating the 25th Anniversary of its founding on Sunday, September 24, 2000.

We are currently making plans for this event and are looking for ways to honor the founding members of the LMHS, as well as honor early La Mesa families. We would like to include you in the thinking process. Please call Karna Webster (463-1029) with your ideas.

A time capsule, donated for the celebration, will be sealed at the 25th Anniversary event. The LMHS Board has voted to have the capsule opened in 25 years, on September 24, 2025.

We invite you to write letters to be sealed in the capsule. You might want to write about why you came to La Mesa and what it was like when you arrived, or about La Mesa as it is today and your predictions for the future. Write about your family, or anything else that would be of interest twenty-five years from now. Bring or mail your letters to the LMHS by September 15th.

The R. Bruce Carmichael house can be seen high on the knoll of a hill above Carmichael and La Cuesta Drives, on the south-facing slope of Mt. Helix, a charming and graceful example of the Spanish-style homes that were being built in California in the 1920's and 1930's. The living room has a high, beamed ceiling, arched window and entries, and a large, beautiful and inviting fireplace that extends to the ceiling. The house sits in the middle of a two-acre, sloping yard with a sweeping view south to Mexico, west to San Diego and the ocean, and north to Cowles Mountain.



half-way up Beaumont Drive. The boundaries of his purchase were basically defined by the topography of the land, ending at hills and natural stream bottoms.

A Brief Family History

R. Bruce Carmichael and Gloria Smith grew up in Akron, Ohio and were married there on March 26, 1921. He worked as a building contractor for several years at his father's business in Akron. In 1926, at the

age of 27, he and Gloria moved to La Mesa in the hope that the mild San Diego climate would improve the health of their two-year old twins, Gloria and George.

Upon arriving in La Mesa, the Carmichaels stayed for three months at the home of Harriet and Lucius Miles while Mrs. Miles was vacationing in Akron for the summer. The Miles house, built in 1909, can be seen on a hill on the north side of Interstate 8, west of Anthony's Restaurant, and

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From the President...

In grateful appreciation to many of our members, the *La Mesa Historical Society* has had a successful year in many ways. Special thanks to **Pat Kettler** who helped in several areas. She chaired the annual Ice Cream Social, prepared the exhibits, served as a McKinney House docent, was Membership Chair, and has been our Photo Archivist for many years. **Ed Blackman** continued to care for the roses and yard, and helped at all the events. He brought many plants he had grown at home to sell at the Ice Cream Social. **Carol Lockwood** found members to serve as McKinney House docents on Saturdays, and for special tours of the house. **Donna Regan** represented our Society on the La Mesa Historic Preservation Commission. **James Orsborn** helped in many ways - including by obtaining the old La Mesa fire truck which was on display at the Ice Cream Social.

Thanks also to **Barry and Jennifer Kramer** who have been editors of our *Lookout Avenue* newsletter for the past three issues. We are sorry they won't be able to continue, but are grateful to **Linda Michael** who will help out as editor for this issue. **May Ann Ehlers** prepared all the mailings (at least six this past year), and took them to the post office. **Vern Kettler and Tom Webster** helped with a number of set ups and take downs of tables, chairs, etc. for past events, and donated their help in other ways.

We have some big challenges ahead. This includes the painting of the McKinney House and accomplishing some needed repairs on the house and grounds. There is much work to be done to preserve our community's history too. We urgently need more members and must become more visible - some people still don't know that there is a *La Mesa Historical Society*! You can help by encouraging friends, family, neighbors, and even your school to become interested in our local history - and to also become members of the *LMHS*.

So many of you have pitched in to help throughout the year. Without your support we could not maintain the McKinney House and continue to gather and preserve the history of La Mesa.

And so, from the heart, a big THANK YOU EVERYONE!

Karna Webster, LMHS President

Welcome New Members!

Steve and Susan Contino
 Susan Cunningham
 Richard and Hollis Edwards
 Dr. Robert Freeland
 Harry J. George
 Bradley Gordon
 Jenn and Brian Kick
 Susan H. Mitchell
 Helen R. Odum
 Aileen Teague

Officers and Directors

2000-2001

President: Karna Webster
 1st Vice Pres: Carol Lockwood
 2nd Vice Pres: Pat Kettler
 3rd Vice Pres: Ed Blackman
 Secretary: Pat Kettler
 Treasurer: Karna Webster
 Past President: Donna Regan
 Directors: Jim Orsborn • Norrie West
 Desiree Romero • Susan Mitchell



Mt. Helix (1920's) view east from north of Lemon Ave. and Bancroft Dr.

Coming in the Fall Issue...

In the second in a series of "Early Houses of La Mesa", we hope to present an article about a Cliff May house built on the southern slope of Mt. Helix. Cliff May, a San Diego architect, became famous for his California ranch-style designs which were built all over California. Also, in the next issue of Lookout Avenue, we plan to list, with a brief history, each of the fourteen La Mesa homes and buildings that have been designated as historic.

Recent Acquisitions

The following artifacts and photographs have been graciously donated to the Historical Society or otherwise acquired:

"Traps"

A children's game, 1920's
donated by Kenneth Willson

Written Remembrances
of Early La Mesa
by Roy Edwards,
La Mesa City Engineer,
1930-1952

and other materials
donated by Richard Edwards

A child's trunk, 1920's
donated by Ralph W. Rogers

Photographs, 8 black/white
of the Carmichael house
and family
donated by Gloria C. Sever

Glass light shades
for ceiling fixtures
donated by Hal Doerr

Photograph post card,
A.H. Clements house
on Date Avenue, La Mesa, c. 1910

A small parlor table, owned by the
Rev. and Mrs. McKinney, was
recently repaired, restored, and
placed in the Children's Bedroom at
the McKinney House Museum.

Annual Meeting Report

The Annual Meeting held at the Brigantine Restaurant on June 25th was well attended. The new Board was elected by acclaim, and, following lunch, an informative history of the Cuyamaca Flume was presented by Dr. Leland Fetzer, SDSU professor and author of "A Year in the Cuyamacas".



Resting on the Running Board

La Mesa Historical Society members Jo Pearson and Julius Acevez (Mayor of La Mesa 1958-1960), driving the Pearson's Model A Ford, represented the Historical Society in La Mesa's Annual Flag Day Parade on June 10th.

College Student Volunteers to Compile Records

Julie Edelman, a first-year history student at UCSD, called the Society to volunteer her time to the LMHS on Saturdays for ten weeks.

Julie and her parents recently moved to La Mesa from central California. Julie felt that this would be a good way to become better acquainted with her new community.

On July 9th, Julie started her volunteer work and she is now busy organizing newspaper articles and other materials about La Mesa and La Mesans into clipping files for use by future researchers at the McKinney House Museum.

Thank you, Julie for your youthful enthusiasm, willingness to help, and energy.

*Carol Lockwood
Docent Chair*

Everyone is invited...

LA MESA IN THE MOVIES

**A History of Movie Making
in La Mesa (1911-1920's)**



Sunday, Aug. 27th - 2 p.m.
at the
**McKinney House
Thelma Palermo Annex**

This very interesting program will include a showing of the movie, "Three Million Dollars." The film was made in Lakeside in September 1911, just a month before the same movie company moved to La Mesa.

There is no charge, but seating is limited. The building is air-conditioned for comfort.

**For further information,
Karna Webster
(619) 463-1029.**

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The Carmichael House

visible from the picture window of the Brigantine Restaurant.

In the summer of 1926, Bruce was hired by the City of La Mesa as contractor on the Lemon Avenue road-building project, east of Bancroft Drive. That same year, he purchased 80 acres of land, south of Lemon Avenue, from Ed Fletcher. Gloria Carmichael recalled in an interview that Fletcher Drive was a private road when her husband purchased land from Ed Fletcher and that there was no access to his newly acquired holdings -- that is until Fletcher gave Carmichael permission to use his road.

The Carmichael's plan was to develop a 35-acre tract and pipe water up the hill to a site where they would build their home. The construction began with Carmichael Drive, which started at Fletcher Drive and curved left at the top of the hill, ending near



the main entrance of their new house. They maintained this road and, later, Edgewood Drive, until the County took over this responsibility some years later. As he developed his land into avocado

orchards, Carmichael also developed a nursery, planting and selling avocado trees. He was among the early developers of the



avocado industry on Mt. Helix, along with H.J. Hanson. Bruce also planted 18 acres of his land on the south side of La Cuesta in winter tomatoes in the late 1920's. He bought a truck on time to haul his tomatoes to a packing house on Nebo Drive in La Mesa, but a blight ruined the crop and left the Carmichaels with nothing but truck payments.

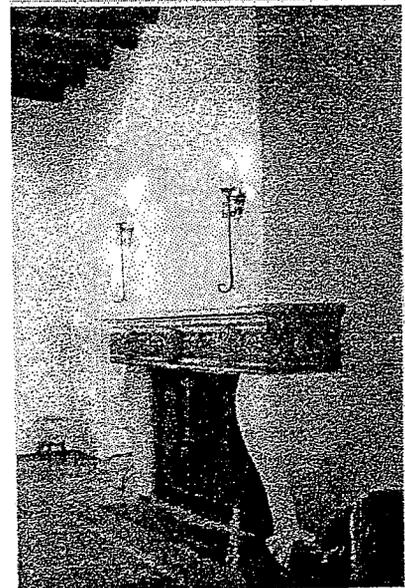
Construction History of the Carmichael House

The Carmichael's Spanish-style house was built by Theodore T. Clemesha, who was also the architect. Mr. Clemesha, a local contractor, was a native of Canada, and lived for many years on 67th Street in La Mesa Heights (El Cajon Blvd. and 70th Street area).

Construction on the house began in the fall of 1926 and was completed on March 26, 1927, when the family moved into their new home which they named "El Tejado".

Coming from the cold winter climate of Ohio, the Carmichaels thought that there was no real need for heat in the winter in the semi-arid climes of San Diego's east county and that the fireplace would be sufficient for warming the house when it was cool. This assumption was soon proved wrong and, within a year, Bruce hired workers to excavate and blast out an area beneath the kitchen in order to install a furnace and heat ducts.

Mr. Clemesha selected and ordered the fireplace inset design from a catalogue, and for years the Carmichaels wondered what the Arabic lettering meant that is seen in the design. Some time later, a friend who read and understood Arabic was visiting and told them that the words say, "None is victorious save Allah".



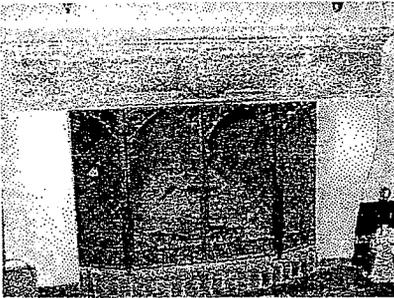
The solarium, located on the south side of the house facing La Cuesta, was glassed in around 1930, and a permanent roof with Spanish tiles replaced the original canvas awning over a porch which led to the solarium. The original flat roof was changed to its present pitch in the early 1950's because of leakage

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The Carmichael House

problems. Mr. Carmichael had several palm trees, which had been removed during a street widening project on La Mesa Blvd., brought up the hill and planted on the grounds of his new home.



With the addition of a new 'family member' — their gardener and friend — a small bedroom, bath, and kitchen area was added on the south side of the house at the time of construction. Mr. Julius Collins had been the gardener at the Miles House in 1926 when the Carmichael family stayed there for several months while their home was being built. He became very close to the family, helping with the layout of the grounds at their Mt. Helix home, and was invited to live there when it was completed.

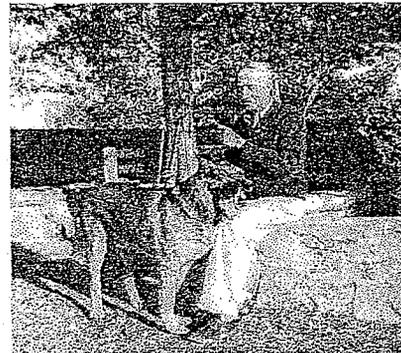
Mr. Collins, who had been born in England in 1870, grew up in Russia, learning the art of gardening from his father who was a gardener for many years at one of the palaces of the Tsar of Russia. Mr. Collins was a graduate of a Russian agricultural college and, for a while, a member of the Tsar's gardening staff. Mrs. Carmichael said that he later spent some years traveling in Europe before coming to America and eventually to San Diego. Mr. Collins continued to live and work at "El Tejado" until it was sold in 1949. He then lived with Bruce and Gloria, for a few

years, at their new home on El Tejado Drive. He died in 1960 at the Edgemore Home in Santee, at the age of 90.

Additional Land Purchases

By 1928, Bruce and Gloria Carmichael had put all their money into the land they purchased, and into the building of their new \$30,000 home, except for some stock that Bruce's mother had given him. She didn't want him to sell it, but he did anyway in order to purchase more land - a good move considering what happened to the stock market in 1929.

The *La Mesa Scout* newspaper recorded in the December 29, 1928 issue, "R. Bruce Carmichael Buys Tract Adjoining Home". This was a



Mr. Julius Collins, friend and gardener for the Carmichael family, is seated on the fishpond that he and Bruce Carmichael built in the shape of a "G" for Bruce's wife, Gloria, and their twins, Gloria and George.

12-acre tract to the west of Carmichael Drive, which encompassed Lavell, San Juan Place, and down the hill to Eucalyptus Canyon and Bancroft Drive (just north of Eucalyptus Park), and north to include Golondrina.

By September of 1931, his land holding totaled 125 acres on this western slope of Mt. Helix and he was having roads built in preparation of subdividing and

selling land for country estate homes. Up to this time, the tract of land in this El Tejado tract around his home had been undeveloped for subdivision.

At this time, Carmichael spent around \$5,000 on road construction, mainly on the road (Edgewood Drive) leading up from Eucalyptus Canyon (Bancroft Drive at Eucalyptus Park), along the face of the hillside and continuing to the east. At the completion of this road building project, he would have water piped to the land when it was sold.

In 1931, a main water line and pumping station was located north of where Edgewood Drive and Bancroft come together. The cost for Carmichael to have water pumped up from this station to his property on La Cuesta was \$350 a month (quite a large sum, considering the times). The Carmichaels continued selling parcels of land into the 1940's, including those on Lavell and San Juan Place.

Community Involvement

Mr. Carmichael, who had served in the U.S. Army during the last year of WWI, was active in La Mesa's American Legion Post for many years. Some of his other community involvements included President of the La Mesa Rotary Club in 1929 and, later, Past Master of the La Mesa Lodge of Masons. He also held memberships in the Scottish Rite and Al Bahr Shrine in San Diego. Carmichael served on the Board of Directors of the La Mesa, Lemon Grove, and Spring Valley Irrigation District (present-day Helix Irrigation District) in the 1930's.

In the spring of 1936, Bruce purchased an insurance agency on

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The Carmichael House

the north side of La Mesa Blvd. between Spring Street and Palm Avenue. This agency had been established in La Mesa by C.W. Ball in 1919. A real estate business was added to the office the following year and Gloria proceeded to get her real estate and insurance licenses, joining her husband at the office in 1937. They continued their business partnership for nearly 20 years until Bruce's death in 1955 at the age of 56.

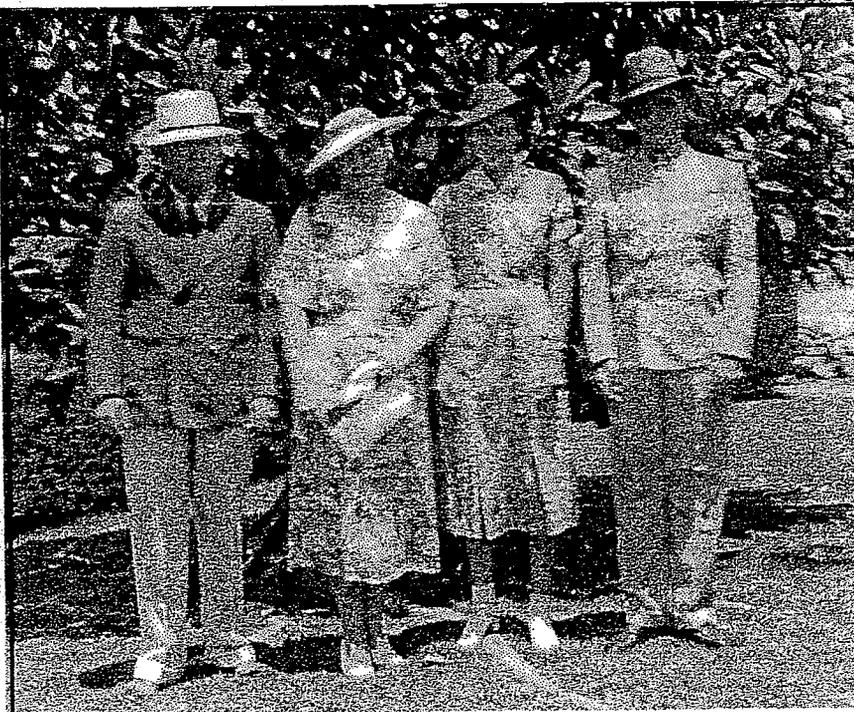
Completion of Family and House History to Date

The Carmichael twins, Gloria and George, who had come to their new home on La Cuesta when they were three years old, grew up there, attended La Mesa Elementary School and Grossmont High School, married and, eventually, moved from La Mesa. Gloria married a La Mesan, Loyd Sever. George, who married in 1955, would later build a home at 9360 Lavell, within view of the house in which he grew up. Today, Gloria lives in Orange County and George lives in Carlsbad. They occasionally come to La Mesa and drive by their childhood home on Mt. Helix.

The Carmichaels sold their home in 1949 to a retired British Army officer and his wife, and moved to a smaller house on El Tejado Drive where they lived until Bruce's death in June of 1955. Gloria continued the

family business and was active in the La Mesa community, becoming a member of the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors in the late 1950's. She was a successful businesswoman and became the co-owner of a second local business that purchased the La Mesa Scout newspaper in the early 1960's.

In 1962, Mrs. Carmichael sold her businesses and moved to Honolulu where she lived for 5 years, returning to La Mesa in 1967 where she made her home for the next twenty years. She died in the Temecula home of her daughter in October of 1992, just days before her 92nd birthday.



The Carmichael Family: R. Bruce, Gloria and the twins, Gloria and George.

Over the years since 1949, the Carmichael House has been sold at least three times and is presently being restored by a young couple with two small children.

References

1. *Notes from conversations with Gloria Carmichael - 1985*

2. *Letters and conversations with Gloria Carmichael Sever, March through July 2000*

3. *La Mesa Scout newspapers:*

- 1927 - May 6, pg.7:
- 1928 - Dec. 28, pg.1:
- 1929 - Apr. 19, pg.1:
- 1930 - Jan. 10, pg.1:
- 1931 - Mar. 27, pg.1:
- 1931 - Sept. 25, pg.1:
- 1932 - Sept. 16, pg.5:
- 1936 - Apr. 3, pg.1:
- 1955 - Jun. 23, pg.2:
- 1962 - Feb. 1, pg.1:

Don't miss the next article in the "Early Homes of La Mesa" series featuring a renowned house on the southern slope of Mt. Helix designed by the famous San Diego architect Cliff May.

The La Mesa Historical Society hopes that you might be inspired to know more about the older homes in your neighborhood. Talk to the homeowners, and gather any information that you can. Copy

photographs, if they are available. Perhaps, in the future, we could publish what you have written in the *Lookout Avenue* newsletter.

For further information, please call Pat Kettler (463-0197).



In Memorium
**LMHS Members
 Are Remembered**

George Holland

George was very interested in and very knowledgeable about the history of the gold rush days in the United States. He was called on many times to present his slide programs about this topic. He also was very knowledgeable about WWII and especially the bombing of our military at Pearl Harbor. George was an amateur photographer and helped the LMHS by photographing many of its pictures onto slide film. He possessed a sharp memory of historical facts and a wonderful sense of humor.

Beatrice Acers

Beatrice was a member of the LMHS from its beginning and she contributed her time, talents, opinions and ideas many times throughout the years. An active member of the Society's quilting group, she was a sharp businesswoman who knew how to promote the wonderful work of the quilters.

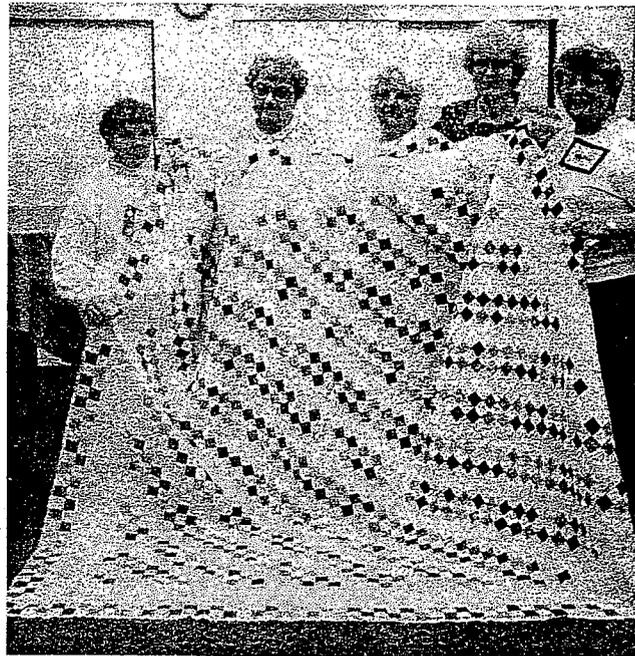
Nadine Washburn

Nadine was also a member of the LMHS from its beginning in 1975. She served on its Board, and was instrumental in starting the Society's quilting group which made a quilt every year for our Ice Cream Social drawing.

Jane Donahoo

Jane grew up in La Mesa and had many friends in our community. Her husband, Lloyd Donahoo, was the son

A Special Thank You
 to the
 Legacy Quilt Guild



The *Legacy Quilt Guild*, a philanthropic organization that quilts for different organizations each year, kindly agreed to make the beautiful "Kitty Korner" pattern quilt for the LMHS 2000 Ice Cream Social drawing. The LMHS wants to thank these ladies for giving their time, talents, and materials so that we would have a first prize offering at this year's social. We extend a very heartfelt "thank you" to these six ladies: Jean Berry (a LMHS member), Gwen Emerson, Connie Freeman, Rosemary Cosgrove, Phyllis Newton, and Kay Angeles.

of an early La Mesa pioneer family. Lloyd was LMHS's first president and helped with the restoration of the McKinney House.

Lena Kasitz

Lena grew up in the La Mesa area and taught for many years at La Mesa Elementary School in the 1940's and 50's. She was a member of the La Mesa Women's Club for over 50 years and a member of the LMHS since 1978.

Prize Winners

Ice Cream Social Drawing

1st Prize

"Kitty Korner" Quilt
 Peggy Browneller

2nd Prize

San Diego Weekend Getaway
 Mark Allan

3rd Prize

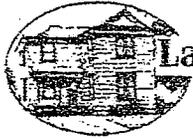
\$50 Gift Certificate
 at Henry's Marketplace
 Warren Winn

4th Prize

Art Print by Hazel Ross
 Warren Win

The Ice Cream Social Drawing had a net profit of \$1,594 for the LMHS. Thank you, everyone, for your support.

Pat Kettler, Ice Cream Social Chair



P. O. Box 882, La Mesa, California 91944

La Mesa Historical Society

Museum: Rev. Henry A. McKinney House (1908)
8369 University Avenue

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
La Mesa, CA 91941
Permit No. 208

Change Service Requested



The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 house-museum located at 8369 University Avenue (corner of Pine Street) in La Mesa. Open 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call 466-0197 for further information.

Lookout Avenue is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society
P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 91944.

Lookout Avenue was the original name of La Mesa Boulevard. From the 1890's until the City Council voted to change the name in 1940, *Lookout Avenue* was La Mesa's main street.

An Invitation to Join...

La Mesa Historical Society Membership

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

- \$250 Benefactor
- \$125 Life (single)
- \$ 40 Patron
- \$ 25 Sponsor/Organization
- \$15 Family (2 adults)
- \$10 Individual
- \$ 1 Student (under 18 yrs.)
- I wish to become involved in the Society's work.*

Name _____ Phone (____) _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

La Mesa Historical Society, P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 91944
Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.