



# La Mesa Historical Society LOOKOUT AVENUE



Volume 20, Number 2

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## Special points of interest:

- La Mesa Historical Society is 25 Years Old
- Lecture on *The California Bungalow*
- 70th Anniversary Celebration Atop Mt. Helix
- Facts About Mt. Helix

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## La Mesa's "Boys of Summer" 1910

La Mesa's first baseball team was formed sometime in the mid- to late 1890s. For many years, the practice field was any reasonably flat, open space around town. They played against other towns in San Diego County as each town had its own baseball team.



## President's Corner

As we approach the year 2000, we are planning special events. We will celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 2000. It's hard to believe that our society has been around that long. I remember my first view of the McKinney House and the shape it was in. Many of our members spent countless hours in the restoration, which included reconstruction of the front porch, scrapping off old paint in the interior and plastering some walls. We have accomplished much with considerable help from the City of La Mesa and through the generosity of the McKinney family.

In addition to the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, we hope to bring you more lectures, more newsletters and more activities in the upcoming year. Your suggestions are always welcome. Just contact Karna Webster at (619) 463-1029.

## La Mesa Historical Society – 25 Years Old

Time has sure flown since the La Mesa Historical Society was formed back in the bicentennial year of 1975. In the year 2000 we will be planning a special event to celebrate our 25 years of collecting and shar-

ing La Mesa's *very special* history. Look for an article in the next newsletter about the history of our Society – including before and after pictures of the restoration of the McKinney House.

## McKinney House Docents Needed

*"This is a great way to learn about the community"*

The sign on the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House says, "Open Saturday 12-3 p.m." We hope to keep this commitment going every Saturday. This will depend on recruiting members of the La Mesa Historical Society who are willing to become docents. Five dedicated members have been the backbone of this program: Donna Regan, Pat Kettler, Mayann Ehlers, Carol Lockwood and Kathy Tinsley. Because of a job commitment on Saturdays, Mayann has had to resign, leaving an opening for a docent on the third Saturday of each month. We want to thank Mayann for all her many years of dedication and are happy she will continue to be a tour docent when possible.

So, we are soliciting your help. One way to become familiar with the house is to join one of the regular docents on a Saturday and get to know the McKinney House and the family that built and lived in it. We have

at least three visitors a week, and there are very few "visitorless" Saturdays. The time goes quickly. Many of the visitors are young families who want to know a little about La Mesa and this is a great way to learn about your community. If another commitment comes up on a Saturday, we are usually able to switch with another docent. It is hoped to have at least two docents at the house each Saturday, and a core of people that can be called on from time to time.

We docents feel that we are providing a historical welcome to La Mesa and new members of our community, and feel, as I'm sure you do also, that where we live is very special. So call and join us - we'd love to meet and know you. If you have any questions, please call me.

Carol Lockwood, Docent Chair  
463-5648

## Lecture on *The California Bungalow*

The San Diego Historical Society is presenting a lecture on Saturday, September 11, 1999. Noted author, Paul Duchscherer will discuss California Arts and Crafts Bungalows, their exteriors, gardens, interior design and furnishings. His discussion will be accompanied by slides taken during the research for his three books: *The Bungalow*; *Inside The Bungalow*; *Outside The Bungalow*. Admission is \$12 for members and \$15 for non-members. Call (619) 298-3142 for further details or a reservation.

Saturday, September 11, 1999  
10:00 to 11:30a.m.  
Thornton Theater, Casa del Prado  
Balboa Park

## Rose Garden Celebration

On Sunday, May 16, 1999, the La Mesa Historical Society held its Second Annual Rose Garden Celebration. Members gathered at 1:30 p.m. to view our heritage roses in full bloom. We were joined by a large contingent of Betty Teague's relatives. Vonn-Marie May, historic garden expert and past president of Save Our Heritage Organization, gave a fascinating talk about the historic gardens at the Marston House in San Diego. The talk was followed by a remembrance of our late member, Betty Teague, whose name was added to our commemorative plaque.



## The Mt. Helix Amphitheater and Cross

It was 70 years ago that the son and daughter of Mary C. Yawkey deeded the Mt. Helix Nature Theater and Cross to the county of San Diego in her memory. Mrs. Yawkey found great comfort whenever she stood on its summit. Like people today, she looked out over the panoramic view in every direction and found peace in what she saw and in the natural beauty of Mt. Helix. Mary Yawkey died in 1923, and in January of 1924, Ed Fletcher, who owned the land on Mt. Helix, deeded 2 parcels, nearly seven acres, at its summit to Cyrus Yawkey and Mary White for the purpose of building a memorial to their mother.

### **"FLUTE OF HILLS" TO BE PRESENTED SEPT. 15 ON HELIX**

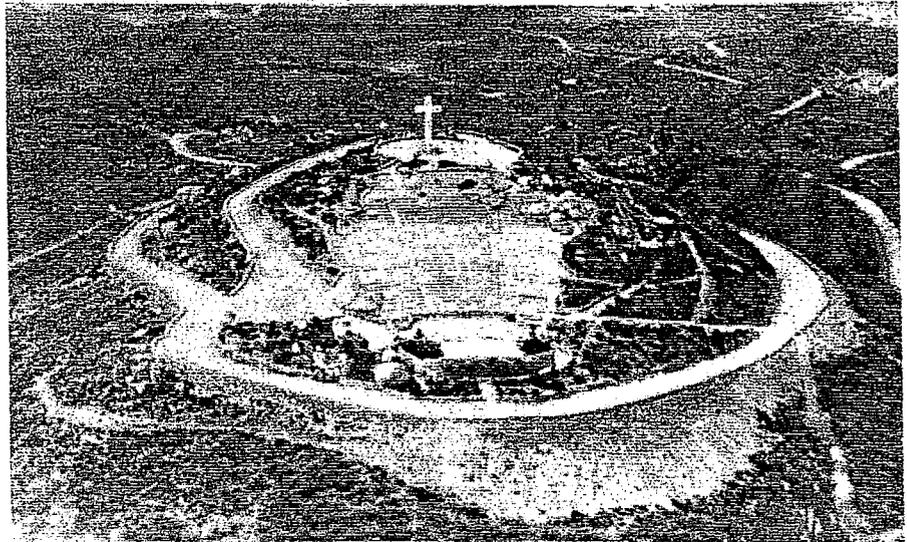
"Flute of the Hills," an Indian legend of how the Big Dipper was formed, will be presented in Mount Helix Nature theatre at 8 p. m. September 15, under auspices of the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce.

This will be the fourth season for the play, which was originated in the Nature theatre at Guatay. It was composed and written by Mrs. Lucy Miller of Guatay, from the legend of the stars as related to her by an Indian squaw, Marie Alto, who has died since. Mrs. Miller believes that she is the only white person to whom the Indians every told this story.

The same cast that has appeared in the play for the last four years will give the local presentation, and the proceeds above the actual expenses will go to the Grossmont Community Hospital endowment fund, it is announced. Two of the prominent actors are Ralph Hastings and Jess Hume, who created their parts.

One of the especially interesting places in the drama is the Indian death dance. This is a ceremony performed once in 20 years by one of the San Diego county tribes. Their last dance was in 1909 at Quipipe, on the edge of the desert beyond the Laguna mountains. Where they will hold next year's celebration has not been announced. Mrs. Miller witnessed the 1909 death dance, and it is faithfully reproduced in the "Flute of the Hills." Among the Indians this rite is considered sacred, and though it may appear to white persons so outlandish as to be ludicrous, those in charge of the play ask that the audience refrain from laughing, remembering how serious it is to its originators. It is unlike any other Indian dance.

A musical theme runs all through the play.



Mt. Helix c. 1929

On July 29, 1929, Fredrick White acted as trustee for his recently deceased wife, Mary and for her brother, Cyrus. He presented to the chairman of the County Board of Supervisors, the deed to the approximately 7-acre park, which included the Mt. Helix Amphitheater and Cross. He also provided a trust fund of \$30,000 for the upkeep and improvements of the park. (As of 1989, this fund had over \$50,000 remaining in it.)

The deed Mr. White presented to the County of San Diego specifically states that the "services be open to the people of all creeds, religions and nations;" "that it may be used for drama, music, pageants, oratories, and all things that tend to elevate and refine mankind." It also said that the "monument and structures now erected...shall be the only monuments and/or structures permitted."

#### *Inscribed on the original bronze plaque:*

MT. HELIX NATURE THEATER  
For the Inspiration and Use of the People  
Lovingly Dedicated  
To the Memory of Their Mother  
MARY CARPENTER YAWKEY  
Who Loved This Mountain Summit  
Ant The Inspiring View  
By  
Cyrus Carpenter Yawkey and Mary Yawkey White  
Easter 1925

### A Brief History of Mt. Helix and the Easter Sunrise Services

#### 1914 through 1916

Starting in 1914, the first Easter sunrise services in San Diego County were held on Mt. Nebo, the hill west of the railroad tracks in downtown La Mesa, and above Date Avenue and Acacia.

#### 1917 to 1924

By 1916, the attendance at these services had grown too large for its location and was moved to the top of Mt. Helix at the encouragement of Ed Fletcher, who owned the land there. In 1918, a wooden cross was placed at/or near its summit and every year since this time, Easter sunrise services have been held on Mt. Helix.

#### 1924 to 1929

In 1924, Mary White and her brother, Cyrus Yawkey, hired well-known San Diego architect, Richard Requa to design an amphitheater and cross at the summit of Mt. Helix. Construction began in December of that year under the direction of Ed Fletcher's eldest son, Ed Fletcher, Jr. The work was complete enough in 1925 to hold an Easter sunrise service and the dedication of the

park on April 12, with over 7,000 people in attendance. Finer detail work on the amphitheater was completed by 1929 when San Diego County inherited the park.

#### 1933 to 1942

The mortarless rock walls that follow the road to the summit of Mt. Helix were built starting in 1933 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) and were completed in 1942.

#### Richard Requa – Architect of the Amphitheater and Cross

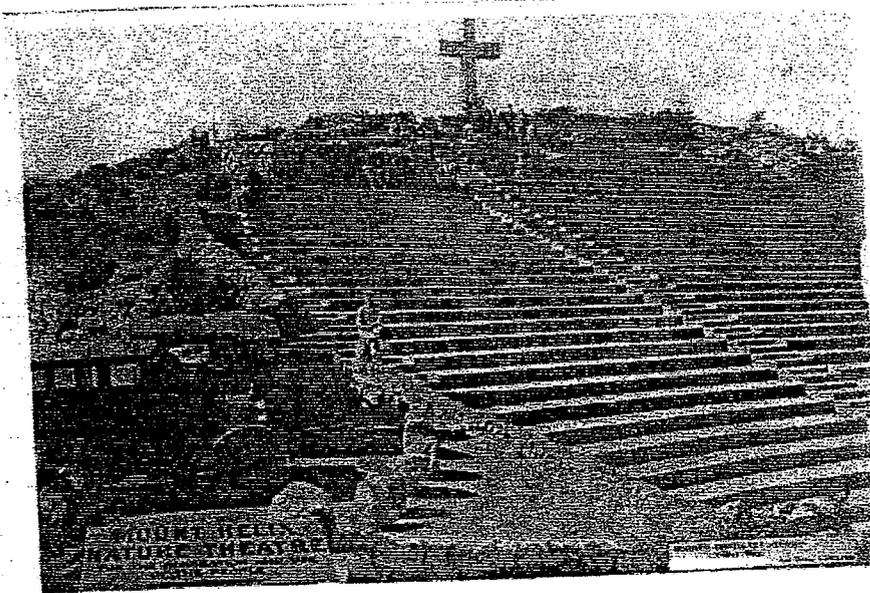
Richard Requa's San Diego architectural career spanned 34 years and the list of well-known structures that he and his partner, Herbert Jackson, designed includes the village of Ranch Sante Fe and the Del Mar Castle. In 1934 he became the Director of Architecture for the 1935 Exposition in Balboa Park. One of Requa's last and most notable achievements before his death in 1941 was the County Administration Building, which stands between Harbor Drive and Pacific Highway in San Diego. He designed this building in collaboration with three other architects.

In 1924, Mary White and her brother, Cyrus Yawkey, hired Requa as the architect for the Mt. Helix Amphitheater and Cross. Construction began in September of that year and was completed on schedule for the April 12, 1925 Easter sunrise service. In his own words, Requa said of the project:

“Perhaps once in a lifetime an architect is given an opportunity to design a building or plan a project that completely fulfills his early dreams; an opportunity that permits full and satisfying expression to create something noble, beautiful, and enduring.”

#### Emerson Knight – Mt. Helix Landscape Architect

Before plans were sufficiently completed to begin construction on the Mt. Helix Amphitheater, Richard Requa contacted Emerson Knight, a well-known San Francisco land-



Mt. Helix Amphitheater c. 1929



Fredrick M. White



Mary Yawkey White

scape architect for a consultation. Knight specialized in landscape architecture of outdoor theaters and whole-heartedly engrossed himself in the Mt. Helix project. The result was a profusion of native shrubs and flowering plants along with other plantings to soften the rugged lines of the summit.

The theater site, at that time an isolated cone-shaped peak, was originally barren and austere, according to what Knight wrote about the project. Plantings were carefully selected by him to soften the general effect without destroying or distracting from the characteristic ruggedness of the site. Trees were planted in such a way as to not obscure the Cross. Mr. Knight felt very close to this project and his own words best express his thoughts about Mt. Helix:

**"In this rocky mountain summit theater...there is a message or translation of rugged simplicity, bold strength, freedom, and unity. This spot, loved by a mother, has been faithfully interpreted into a place for the use and joy of mankind."**

**Other Events Held In the Mt. Helix**

**Amphitheater**

Thanksgiving sunset services were held on Mt. Helix for several years, starting in 1927, and from 1928 until 1936, it was the site of an annual Indian pageant called *Flute of the Hills*. In past years, Grossmont High School held its graduation ceremonies there, as did the Boy Scouts, and the Amphitheater is frequently the background for weddings. Each summer since 1980, it has been the site of Christian Community Theater's summer musicals.

**Construction of the Amphitheater and Cross on Video**

The La Mesa Historical Society has available for sale a 20 minute black and white video showing the Mt. Helix Amphitheater and Cross being constructed in 1924/1925. The original 16mm silent film was shot under the directions of Ed Fletcher, Jr. and in recent years he donated it to the LMHS. This film was put onto video and then a voice-over was made of Mr. Fletcher describing in detail many of the scenes on the tape. Call 466-0197 for more information, or to order a copy. Cost is \$20.

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## A Quick List of Facts About Mt. Helix

- The origin of the name Mt. Helix is credited to a small expedition of scientists who came to San Diego in 1872 to study the plant life of the area. They ended up in East County and climbed what is today called Mt. Helix, discovering a species of snail, which was supposedly not native to the area at that time – the Helix Espursa. Through time the name of this snail became the mountain's name. In Latin, the word helix means spiral. (Information taken from a manuscript by Rufina Crosby, daughter of Rufus Porter, who owned the Bancroft Ranch House in Spring Valley at the time of this scientific expedition.)
- Mt. Helix stands 1,380 feet above sea level.
- Easter sunrise services have been held on Mt. Helix since 1917.
- Ed Fletcher deeded land atop Mt. Helix to the White and Yawkey families in 1924 to be used as a memorial to their mother.
- The Mt. Helix Park is around seven acres, which includes the Amphitheater and Cross.
- The cost of construction was between \$87,000 and \$100,000 before the Amphitheater was sufficiently completed for the April, 1925 Easter sunrise service.
- The Amphitheater seats more than 5,000 people.
- The Cross is 35 feet high.
- The park was turned over to the County of San Diego by the White and Yawkey families in 1929, along with an endowment of \$30,000.
- Mt. Helix is the site of the oldest Easter sunrise service in San Diego County and is understood to be the second oldest continuous Easter service in the United States.

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## Grossmont/Mt. Helix Improvement Association to Hold a 70th Anniversary Atop Mt. Helix

Time: Saturday, September 4th from 4 to 6 p.m.

Purpose: To celebrate the day, July 29, 1929, 70 years ago when the Mt. Helix Park was turned over to the County of San Diego.

Food and Entertainment: A barbecue will be offered by GMIA from 5 to 6 p.m. and the Christian Community Theater orchestra will provide the music. Optional donation of \$2 per person or \$5 per family for the barbecue.

The Cross: The latest update will be given on the court's ruling.

Photo and Video Display: La Mesa Historical Society will provide a display of early photos of Mt. Helix and the video of the 1924/1925 construction of the Mt. Helix Amphitheater and Cross.

For more information and reservations: (619) 588-0206

Grossmont/ Mt. Helix Improvement Association is a 54-year-old, 1,300 household member organization in the unincorporated area of Mt. Helix. The organization keeps members informed about issues pertaining to this community through newsletters and special meetings. The desire is to maintain a rural lifestyle in this area bounded generally by the southern boundary of El Cajon on the north, Bancroft Drive on the west, Hwy 94/Jamacha Road on the south, and Jamacha Road on the east.

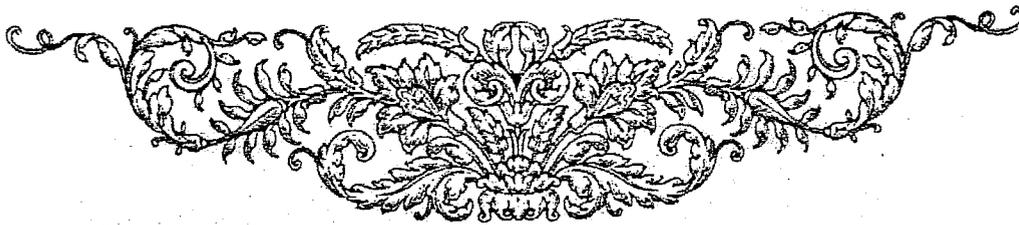
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## New Members

Peggy Browneller	Individual
Peggy Buffo	Individual
Terry Hovland	Individual
Mrs. Duane Jackson	Individual
Barry & Jennifer Kramer	Family
Michael & Brenda Pirie	Family
Larry & Gina Randall	Family
Desiree Romero	Individual
Warren & Bobbi Winn	Family
Todd Tobias & Kimberly Murray	Family

Membership renewals have been mailed for those renewing in the July/September period. Renewals for those renewing in the November/December period will be mailed out in October.

Please renew your membership as it makes up the largest single source of yearly income for the Society. Your contribution helps to maintain the McKinney House as a museum. It also helps in the collection and preservation of old photographs and artifacts of local importance. The Society also conducts educational programs on La Mesa's history at local schools.



### MEMBERSHIP IN LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

#### *An Invitation to Join*

The Society depends upon membership dues, bequests and fund raising activities to support restoration and preservation of local history. *Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.* Membership categories include:

- |                              |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ___ Benefactor..... \$250    | ___ Sponsor/Organization.....\$ 25 | ___ Student (under 18 yrs.).....\$ 1 |
| ___ Life (Single)..... \$125 | ___ Family (2 adults).....\$ 15    |                                      |
| ___ Patron..... \$ 40        | ___ Individual..... \$ 10          |                                      |

To join the La Mesa Historical Society, please complete and return this form with your check to:  
**LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 882, LA MESA, CA 91944.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* I would like to become \*  
 \* involved in the \*  
 \* Society's work.  \*  
 \*\*\*\*\*



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. Hours are 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday afternoon or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call 466-0197 for further information.

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

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.