
Heritage

El Cajon Historical Society Quarterly News

*Volume 22, Issue 2 April
2001*

Lights! Camera! Action! April Meeting to Star New Video, Highlight Local Films

The new Knox House video created for us by Front Burner Film & Video is ready to share with our members and we invite you to be among the first to see the new production starring our museum and its talented tour guide, Eldonna Lay. Dressed in period costume, Eldonna takes the viewer on a tour of the house, sharing information about the Knox family, the hotel and house, the furnishings, and life in early El Cajon. The video, priced at \$12 for members and \$15 for non-members, will be of interest to history lovers and will be of great use to local students who participate in our annual essay program. The video will have its premiere --- and will be available for purchase --- at our April 25th luncheon at the Community Center, 195 E. Douglas Avenue in downtown El Cajon. The lunch buffet catered by Country Comfort will include three entree choices, two salads, dessert, and beverages for \$11.00 per person. Please use the registration form included in this newsletter.

Our program will also include a conversation with Kathy Anderson, executive

director of the San Diego Film Commission, who will talk about the area's long history as the scene of hundreds of movie and television productions.

For some interesting background information on the topic, take a look at Welton Jones' Critic-at-Large column in the March 18th edition of "The San Diego Union-Tribune" in which he talks about local movies dating back to the early silent films produced at small, local studios in Lakeside and La Mesa. Jones says the Museum of San Diego History plans a Summer 2002 exhibit featuring the area's movie past.

Oral History Interview Guide Ready; Volunteers Needed to Help with Project

With the help of experienced interviewer Eldonna Lay, we now have a suggested format for interviews of our members and other long-time residents of the community. Eldonna includes suggested interview techniques and ideas for leading people comfortably through their conversations.

The histories, a valuable connection with our local heritage, will become part of the organization's permanent collection. We would also be delighted to accept copies of personal or family books, stories, reminiscences, movies, or other records any of our readers may have compiled for their own heirs and friends. They will be important additions to our collection and will have a permanent place in our files.

If you would like to share your experiences or to help collect those of others, if you like to talk or to listen, and if you have a few hours to devote to this important project, please call the Historical Society office at 444-3800.

Society Schedules Delicious Fund Raiser, Seeks Tasty Casseroles and Desserts

Both the Historical Society and our hungry audience members at the April 25th

meeting can benefit from your donation of desserts or casseroles for a fund raising sale which will take place at the meeting. Several Board members have offered to bake sweets or to make casseroles which can be refrigerated or frozen for meals at home.

If you would like to participate with a contribution at the meeting, please bring wrapped foods in a disposable container and add any cooking instructions which may be needed. Please pack casseroles so they will stay cold or frozen until the purchaser gets them home.

The sale will be a nice way for the cooks among us to share our talents with others who may not enjoy cooking or who may appreciate a little help with meal preparation.

Membership Benefit Offered to Entice New Museum Docents

At its March meeting, the Board of Directors approved the offer of a year's free membership in the Historical Society for community members who would like to join us as hosts and tour guides at the Knox House.

Our docents are asked to work one day per month on a regular schedule (the museum is open from 12:30 until 3:30 Thursdays and Saturdays) and will always work with at least one other person. Saturday volunteers also often have the assistance of one or more of the Sprites members in our Junior Docent program. The girls, all high school students, have made a long-

term commitment to work with the Historical Society as part of their community philanthropy program, and we're delighted to have them with us.

Special training and refresher workshops help teach our docents about the museum, our files, collections, and other local information and resources they or our visitors have access to.

Become one of a special group of people who have a chance to show off El Cajon and the Knox House to our museum friends, neighbors, newcomers, and school children! If you have three hours a month and would like to make a commitment to the docent program, please call the museum at 444-3800 or call our president, Judy Garrett, at 589-8010. We look forward to working with you!

Readers Sought for Annual Essay Contest Entries

Tammy Goodwater, chair of our Third Grade Essay Contest, is seeking volunteers to help read essays submitted for this year's local history contest by dozens of students in the community. Entries were due March 30th and the winners will be announced at a May 17th program at the El Cajon Community Center. Essays will be read during April. Tammy asks readers for a commitment of a few hours and a meeting or conference call to help select the award recipients.

Most of the entries are the result of lots of hard work by the students and they give readers a terrific opportunity to expand their own knowledge of a wide variety of topics, some of which in recent years have included artist Olaf

Wieghorst, the Julia Liffreing house, Cajon Speedway, the Fletcher family, and interviews with local residents. If you

would like to help this year, please call Tammy at

596-7780.

What's New in Mr. Knox's Neighborhood?

Recent issues of the "Daily Transcript" and the "El Cajon Gazette" list an impressive number of projects planned or under way in downtown El Cajon. Among them are renovation of the historic Weinstock building and the Wieghorst house, construction of the El Cajon Fire History and Learning Center, and construction of new buildings which will house restaurants and other commercial space.

At the Weinstock building, developer Ross Nicholson plans to offer a 2,000 square

foot ground floor restaurant space and to remodel the second floor of the building for office tenants.

The Wieghorst Foundation, recipient of recent financial gifts from Viejas Enterprises, the El Cajon Rotary Club, and Friends of East County Arts, will begin work this Spring to renovate and reopen the late artist's home as part of the Museum and Western Heritage Center complex. An adjacent building has been remodeled and is now open Tuesdays through Fridays from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. as gallery, gift shop, and meeting space.

The Crystal Ballroom, a large banquet facility, is now housed in the former Bank of America building at the corner of Magnolia and Wisconsin Avenues. The Chaldean American Association recently completed a major remodeling of the large, vacant building to create 11,000 square feet of banquet, restaurant, and meeting space.

Other restaurant spaces — good news for audiences at the East County Performing Arts Center — are planned on the northwest and southwest corners of Main and Magnolia and at two other locations on Main Street. The Al Basha Middle Eastern restaurant is open at 463 N. Magnolia, Kozak's has become Goody's Drive-in and Steakhouse, and the owners of Por Favor have announced plans to open a second restaurant downtown.

The El Cajon Firefighters Association is actively raising funds to move the historic building which once housed the city's first fire fighting apparatus from its current location at the city storage yard to a new home on Prescott

Promenade where it will become the focal point of a new fire museum and learning center.

Our congratulations to downtown tenants and property owners and to Downtown El Cajon, Inc. for their vision and hard work!

Internet Opens Convenient New Opportunities to Explore Our Family Trees

Families who have access to computers and are able to connect to the Internet have a rapidly increasing variety of research materials and resources available to them for exploration of their family histories. Once available only to people able to travel to libraries and archival collection points, many sources are now open at little or no cost to individuals with basic computer skills.

Among the sources recommended in a recent column in "The San Diego Union-Tribune" are:

Family Search (www.familysearch.org), the genealogical database of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, housed in the church's collection in Salt Lake City.

My Family, a company working to build "the largest and most active online community in the world for families." It currently offers three Internet sites:

www.ancestry.com

www.myfamily.com

www.familyhistory.com

The three sites have searchable databases, family history message boards, and information about books, magazines, and other resources.

Editor's Note: Internet users will find dozens of other sources of information, some very specific to individual families, plus instructions for beginning a family research project by simply typing "genealogy" in the search box on their Internet screens.

Many programs are available at little or no cost and most are surprisingly easy to use.

On the Reading List

Did you know Santee was named for its first postmaster? That the Navy hospital in Balboa Park was dedicated in 1922? That Oceanside is the home of the California Surf Museum? Or that the Lady in White still haunts the old Vallecito stage coach station in the Anza-Borrego Desert?

Several books of local interest can be found in area stores including the new Borders at Parkway Plaza. Among the interesting titles are:

- 1500 California Place Names: Their Origin and Meaning. William Bright, 1998, University of California Press.

- Yesterday in San Diego. Arthur Ribbel, 1990, Rancho Press.
- Desert Lore of Southern California. Choral Pepper, 1999, Sunbelt Publications.
- Secret Sites of Historic Trivia. (part of the Explore San Diego series) William Carroll, 1994, Coda Publications.

Dudley's Bakery Family Memories Prove to be Popular Meeting Topic

Almost 60 members and guests attended our January 25th quarterly meeting at Jamacha Junction, lunching on a delicious choice of chef's salad, French dip sandwiches, or chicken cordon bleu.

Our speaker, Jean Meagher, daughter of Dudley's Bakery founders Dudley and Mary Pratt and a native of El Cajon, told of her family's lifelong interest in cooking and of her late father's efforts to open a nice restaurant in the community. Finding that people would rather travel to downtown San Diego for a 'night out,' he converted his restaurant space at the corner of Main and Avocado to a bakery to complement the new Safeway store down the street. The Village Bakery operated from 1949 until 1961 when he moved the business to its current location in Santa Ysabel.

An excellent cook and baker, Dudley Pratt developed 43 bread recipes including

Seven Grain Mission Bread, one of the most successful. Several of his recipes, including Danish Apple Bread, were the happy result of trips he and Mary enjoyed.

Jean shared recipes and samples with our audience, and told us she is currently writing a family history which will be richly illustrated with additional recipes.

Sulzfeld Way Joins City's Street System to Honor Sister City Partnership

The City Council recently recognized the city's second of four Sister Cities by choosing "Sulzfeld Way" as the name for the new street which connects Main Street and Rea Avenue.

El Cajon and Sulzfeld, a small community in southern Germany, have been partners in the program since 1975 and have enjoyed a number of formal and informal visits among residents of the two communities. Sulzfeld's Fire Brigade Band, a visitor on two previous occasions, has tentative plans to return to El Cajon during the Fall of 2002, perhaps to perform during our city's International Friendship Festival.

The new street name joins Goulburn Court and Comondu Court, two streets named earlier to honor Sister Cities relationships with communities in Australia and Mexico. El Cajon also has a partnership with Kolomiya, Ukraine.

A Look Back

The passage of a few years and a change in our attitudes about the roles each of us plays in the world can lead to some fascinating memories, as illustrated by this description from the Editor's father's 1939 high school yearbook.

"The Ambepa Club, organized in 1916 and restricted to 100 girls per year, plans programs teaching the girls to arrange their hair, use cosmetics tastefully, and to wear the proper clothes at the proper time. Their motto is Making the Best of our Resolutions."

Downtown to Host Classic Car Show Wednesday Evenings through October

April 4th was the first night of "Cajon Classic Cruise," a weekly car show sponsored by the downtown management district and the Monday Night Car Club. The event, scheduled from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m. every Wednesday through October 31st, will include entertainment on several stages, dozens of classic automobiles and motorcycles parked on the streets, and vehicles moving along a number of formal cruise routes on Main Street, Rea Avenue, and other selected streets.

The weekly Farmers Market at Main and Orange Streets will continue its 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. hours. Stop by for a bouquet of beautiful flowers and a steadily increasing variety of produce as artichokes, strawberries, corn, and other locally grown fruits and vegetables become available.

Storage Container Offers Secure Facility for Museum Acquisitions and Collections

With funds from the Bryant Trust, the Historical Society's Board of Directors has purchased a gently used shipping container, one of the large, watertight steel boxes traditionally found on freighters and cargo ships. The 40 foot long metal 'building' will allow us to move items now stored in the old firehouse scheduled to become the cornerstone of the planned Fire History and Learning Center on Prescott Promenade and will provide additional storage space for many of the important materials we are offered by community members and others seeking a new home for family possessions.

We continue to get calls and letters from people who have items they wish to donate and we are pleased to receive them with the stipulation that, as appropriate, they may be added to our own local collection, given to other historical programs, or sold to raise funds for our organization.

A recent call from a local woman planning to move closer to family members in another state resulted in the donation of children's turn-of-the-century wooden blocks, marbles, kitchen implements, and other small items. We were

delighted that she thought of us as she prepared to pack and move from a house she has lived in for more than 40 years.

Many of the items we have received recently have become key elements of displays in the El Cajon Library and in the window of the former Dudenhoeffer Jewelry store on Main Street. We invite you to take a look!

The Inside Back Page

In Celebration of our Heritage

by Judy Garrett, President

“What’s a historical society?,” asked the young boy who had come to the Knox to find information for his entry in our Third Grade Essay Contest. A good question and, as we talked, I began to wonder if the name of our organization fully reflects our efforts to, as Army recruiters once promised, “be all you can be.”

My dictionary defines “society” as an organized group of persons associated together for religious, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic, or other purposes. Yes, that certainly applies to us, particularly to our role in maintaining the cultural, political, and patriotic history of our community. But what of “historical?” As a former English teacher, I know the word is used solely as an adjective, one my dictionary defines as characteristic of history or past events, belonging to the past, having once existed or lived, and similar descriptive language. So, are we technically an organized group of persons belonging to the past?

Far from it!

We are, instead, a group of individuals passionate about our local history. The organization’s annual essay contest is a marvelous way of enticing children to become involved in their local community and to understand its history. Participants choose topics they have a personal interest in and the final results are often a delightful expansion of their knowledge and ours as we see interviews with long-time residents, histories of local businesses, chronologies of the valley’s growth, and tales created by young people who write about themselves as contemporaries of the Knox children.

And what about “history?” Dictionary definitions all involve reference to events. Should we not, though, define ourselves by more than the records of a series of specific occasions?

The city’s International Friendship Festival focuses on the ethnic heritage and rich cultural experiences of its participants, all part of the complex fabric of this country. In January 2000, in the first Heritage column I wrote as president of this organization, I said I believed “we in El Cajon have great reason to respect the special role our community has played in the growth of the region and we must continue to look for opportunities to share that heritage with people both inside and outside the city.” I also wrote that, “in an evolving community, there is a great opportunity to create a rich texture of past and present, of preservation and change, of tradition and innovation.” Do those statements not still offer a wonderfully encompassing definition of who we are, who we can be, and what the mission of our organization should be?

I was recently in Claremont, a charming old city east of Pasadena, in which the energetic local history organization is known as Claremont Heritage. Would El Cajon Heritage or Heritage Society be an appropriate new name for us? Could it help to better identify us and to describe our dynamic role as protector and spokesman for our own community's history and traditions? I look forward to your thoughts.

Board Offers Attractive New Membership Benefit

In conjunction with the recent production of a new video tour of the Knox House Museum, the Board of Directors voted to establish a two-tiered price structure which will make the video tape an attractive benefit for current and new members of the organization. The video will be sold to non-members for \$15.00 per copy and to members at \$12.00 per copy, a twenty percent discount in recognition of our members' continuing support. The video is an informative, professional production which will be of great use to local schools and to participants in our essay contest. They also make terrific gifts for friends and relatives in other parts of the country.

If you are not now a member and would like to join, please stop by the museum for an application or leave a message for us at 444-3800 and we will be happy to send one to you.

Knox House Museum hours:

12:30 - 3:30 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays

Heritage is published quarterly for members and friends of the El Cajon Historical Society. Send comments and materials for publication to the El Cajon Historical Society, P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973. Phone: (619) 444-3800.

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P.O. Box 1973
El Cajon, CA 92022 - 1973

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
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Permit # 154

Membership Meeting
Wednesday, April 25, 2001
-- details inside --