
Heritage

El Cajon Historical Society Quarterly News

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2002*

April Meeting to Feature Lunch, Lessons, and Tours of Water Conservation Garden

The beautiful Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College will be the setting for our Spring meeting Thursday, April 18th. The four acre garden adjacent to the Heritage of the Americas Museum features a spectacular array of colorful plant materials, examples of creative design solutions for slopes and hillsides, a wildlife garden, and dozens of ideas for yards of all sizes whose owners want to enjoy the benefits of reduced water use.

A box lunch, priced at \$10 per person, will be served at noon in the picnic area. Our program will include an orientation by Garden Administrator Bruce Drake who will tell us about the history and

purpose of the project created by the Helix and Otay Water Districts and the Grossmont-Cuyamaca College District. We'll also have an opportunity to learn about the Kumeyaay Indians' use of plant materials from Sylvia McKenzie, a docent at the garden.

In addition, local author Sandra Maynes will sell and autograph copies of her recently published book titled Padres and Indians: Settling San Diego County's Frontier.

Participants in the day's activities are encouraged to arrive half an hour or so before lunch to have time to tour the Water Conservation Garden. Registration and driving instructions are enclosed in this issue of the "Heritage."

Dozens of Students Expected to Participate in this Year's Annual Essay Contest

Third grade students throughout the local area are busy researching, interviewing, learning, and enjoying themselves while preparing for the Historical Society's annual essay contest. The project, coordinated again this year by Board member Tammy Goodwater, has

often seen essays added to the Historical Society's collection and we hope this year will result in the same good fortune.

More than 20 Cajon Valley Union School District teachers attended a recent workshop to learn about the contest, available resources, the Knox House Museum, and archival resources available for the first time this year at the El Cajon Public Library on Lexington Avenue. The library is open daily, providing students more convenient access to materials than is possible at the museum.

Essays must be submitted to the Cajon Valley school district by Friday, April 12th, to allow sufficient time for reading and judging prior to the May 16th awards program at the El Cajon Community Center. All interested community members are invited to attend the 7:00 p.m. event which will feature a poem, exhibits, and a special program, all by students from Lynn Caruso's classroom at Chase Avenue Elementary School.

Nicole Bartlett, winner of the 2001 competition, will lead the Pledge of Allegiance and the winner of this year's contest will be given the opportunity to read his or her essay to the audience.

CALL FOR READERS --- Essay contest coordinator Tammy Goodwater is looking for a few volunteers to help read and judge this year's entries. The task, to be done during the week of April 15th, is an easy, enjoyable way to help the students and to learn more about the community! To volunteer for a few hours, please call Tammy at 596-7780.

Local School Administrator Wins Award from Regional History Organization

We extend cheers to Dr. Alice Rodriguez, Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Cajon Valley Union School District, who recently received the John Montgomery Award for significant contribution to local history programs in the classroom. Alice, a hard working member of the team responsible for our annual 3rd grade essay competition, was nominated by our Board of Directors for the honor announced at the regional Congress of History Conference held March 1st and 2nd in Carlsbad. Congratulations!

September 11 Tragedy Brings Renewed Commitment from Museums, Cultural Centers

“A man came upon a little bird on its back with its feet stretched high in the air. The man asked “Why are you laying upside down with your feet in the air?” The bird replied “The sky is falling, and I’m holding it up with my feet.” The man says “That’s ridiculous. You’re just a little bird. You can’t hold up the sky with your feet.” “[I] do what I can,” said the bird. “As the sky appears to be falling on life as we have known it, the cultural community has a vital role to play. Just after the attack, people reported visiting museums just to see something beautiful, to have their faith in beauty reaffirmed. They went also, they said, to be in places with other people. Museums, historic sites, and cultural centers of every sort can reaffirm beauty; we can ask hard questions; we can stimulate discussion; we can place contemporary events in perspective; we can bring people together to find comfort and common cause; we can serve as a touchstone of what is good and worth preserving in our culture. We can do these things and more. And we should.

“At times, in the face of an overwhelming evil, in the face of a world turned topsy turvy, our efforts may appear futile or of peripheral importance. That is precisely the time to heed the little bird’s example . . . and do what we can.”

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from “When the Sky Falls: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum Responds to September 11” by Ruth J. Abram. History News, Winter 2002.

Board Busy With Variety of New Projects for Society

The Historical Society’s 2002 Board of Directors, under the leadership of President Janie Bender, has accomplished a great deal during the first few months of this year and is looking forward to the implementation of a variety of additional projects as the year progresses.

Members of the Sprites, an East County mother/daughter philanthropic organization which has worked with us for several years, are being trained to transfer our archival materials and other records to the new “Past Perfect” computer software program purchased with last year’s generous grant from the Sprites.

The Board is exploring options for the acquisition of additional office space for use by our archivist, the Sprites, our docents, and community groups attending Society workshops and programs.

The East County Rose Society, creators of the lovely garden around the gazebo in Judson Park, will work with the Board to plant an additional garden adjacent to the Knox House.

The Board will conduct a home tour this Spring and has endorsed participation in this Fall’s antique auction planned by St. Alban’s Episcopal Church.

This Summer will see installation of a window mural program featuring original art work depicting life in our museum when it was the Knox family home. Local artist Robert Kelsch is working with us to paint scenes on window shades which will be rolled down when the building is closed.

Clothing, materials, and other items stored in the old fire house have been moved to the Society's metal storage container.

A Look Back

"The cup was filled to the brim with wine, ale, or mead, on the top of which would float a piece of toasted bread. After putting his lips thereto, the host would pass the cup to the guest of honour on his right hand. In this manner the cup would circulate round the table Every one having taken a sip, the cup came back finally to the host, who drained it, and then swallowed the piece of toast in honour of all his guests.

"Such was the origin of "toasts."

Inns, Ales and Drinking Customs of Old England.

Frederick W. Hackwood, 1909

Donated Catalog Gives Clues to Cooking in Knox Kitchen

Knox House Museum Curator Eldonna Lay reports that the Society recently received a Wrought Iron Range Company catalog which helps provide information about the cook stove now in the Knox kitchen. Home ranges, she tells us, were hot sellers in the last few decades of the

19th century and we know the range we have was patented by the Home Steel Range Company on April 20, 1888. We have known little else, though.

The cover of the recently donated sales catalog/cookbook is a photograph of the St. Louis, Missouri, company's new Home Comfort Range Number 1900. A statement below the photo says "Range illustrated above is sold only from our wagons, by our traveling salesmen, at a uniform price throughout the United States and Canada." The pictured range bears a remarkable resemblance to ours, Eldonna tells us. In fact, drawings show that two iron handles/wrenches are "combination lifters" which can be used on our stove, extremely helpful information because the catalog contains directions for operating, cleaning, and care during freezing weather. A warning cautions "In extreme cold weather the water should be dipped from reservoir at night to prevent freezing, and replaced next morning before the fire is started." How many families, we wonder, had to go outside to hand-pump well water before the fires were lit inside their freezing kitchen!

"Bringing a Rainbow of Colors Inside"

by Christina Haddock

Second Place Winner, 2001 Essay Contest

"How can you bring a rainbow of colors inside a church or a house? Louis Comfort

Tiffany has the answer to that question. You bring the rainbow through stained glass.

“Let’s go back in time and see how rainbows got inside houses and churches. There is a church right here in El Cajon where a rainbow of colors shines every day through stained glass. This particular stained glass window was hand-made by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany was born in 1848 and was an artist for more than 50 years. He painted oil and watercolor paintings of light, color, and nature. He traveled to Europe and North Africa for a lot of his paintings. He also learned about medieval and Roman glass. Tiffany liked the glass he saw so much in Europe and North Africa that he started to make his own glass.

“Louis Comfort Tiffany wanted the average people, not just the rich people, to have stained glass in their homes. So, Tiffany made stained glass lamps for the average people so they could have a rainbow in their homes. Tiffany made windows for the rich people as well. You can see these windows in the White House when President

Arthur was there, Mark Twain’s house, and Cornelius Vanderbilt’s house.

“There is a Tiffany window in El Cajon. There is a church called Christ Church Unity on Lexington Avenue which has a Tiffany window with God and children asking Him questions. The window is 12 feet wide and 18 feet tall. It almost takes up a whole wall of the church. It is protected by bullet-proof glass because it is so special. Today it is worth \$300,000.

“The window was made for a Catholic church in Pennsylvania in 1905. The church was going to be destroyed because there was not enough work for the people to do in Pennsylvania in 1905. A church member found the window before the church was going to be destroyed and she bought the window for the church in El Cajon. The window is so big that they had to build a new church so the window could stand in the church. It stood in a wooden frame with bullet-proof glass until they got the money to build a new church. It took about 3 years to raise the money. It was shipped from Pennsylvania to El Cajon by truck. In order to ship it, they had to take it apart because it was so valuable that they thought it would break shipping it.

“This Tiffany window is special to the church because it has so much history. It was hard for the people to go through the difficulty of getting the window into their church. It is the largest Tiffany window on this side of the Mississippi river. Tiffany windows are so famous that everybody wants to buy them.

“Next to the church, there is the original church which is very small where my mom and dad got married and I was Christened. To this day, the two churches are standing side by side, and so is the rainbow.”

“The First Newspapers”

by Victoria Luna

Third Place Winner, 2001 Essay Contest

“The very first newspaper was called the El Cajon Star. The El Cajon Star was made in May 18, 1889. The editor was Francis Whaley. It was printed down by the Cuyamaca railroad station. It was titled “El Cajon Star. The Only Paper on Earth.”

“Francis Whaley moved his newspaper office and plant to El Cajon from Oceanside. He was a real estate man and the business office of the El Cajon Star was located in the real estate office at El Cajon City. The El Cajon Star went out of business after a few months and the El Cajon Valley was without a newspaper for two years.

“On March 12, 1982 real estate man W.J. Somers started “The El Cajon Valley News.” Seventy three years later, on March 1, 1965 “The El Cajon Valley Newspaper” became “The Daily Californian.”

“The earliest edition of the El Cajon Star known to exist is the third issue, dated June 1, 1889. The front page reads, “San Diego County as the cheapest in the United States.” Under the heading “Farm Notes” it talks about “the high quality of East County cattle.” Advertisements in the El Cajon Star newspaper show that the El Cajon Barber Shop with Hot

and Cold Baths was in the Corona Hotel — and D.S. Hubbell had a Billiard Parlor there.

“A look at a copy of the El Cajon Valley news dated Saturday, December 31, 1893 shows the following heading, “Happy New Year”, “The Raisin Box Valley”, “Ayer’s Sarsaparilla”, “El Cajon”, “E. Backenstose, County’s Veterinary Surgeon.” News stories had to compete for front page space with ads and items about out of town visitors.

“Russ Stockwell, archivist for the El Cajon Historical Society said “El Cajon’s earliest newspapers certainly provided firsthand information on their way of life, what people did, their social activities and their viewpoint on things that were going on.” The newspapers “offered a picture of the region and its people.”

“The reason I chose to write about El Cajon’s first newspapers is I wanted to know what life was back then. What people wrote and read about. I wondered what people had to say about El Cajon.

“I learned about The Knox Hotel, The Corona Hotel, The Corners and people that lived back then. I also found out that my house was built on land that once belonged to Isaac Lankershim, a San Francisco capitalist that in 1860 purchased the greater portion of Rancho El Cajon and planned to use the land for wheat ranches.”

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(EDITOR’S NOTE: “My Life Out West” by Nicole Bartlett, 2001 Essay Contest First Place Winner, was published in the July 2001 Heritage.)

Bestselling Author Says Oral Histories Should Be Treasured Remembrances

“Once we reach adulthood, most of us assume we know all there is to know about our parents and other family members. However, if you take the time to ask questions and actually listen to the answers, you may find there is still much to learn about the people so close to you. . . .

. . . . Oral histories are a dying art, which is sad indeed, for they show appropriate respect for the lives and experiences of those who have come before. And, just as important, they document those remembrances, for once those lives are over, that personal knowledge is lost forever.

Unfortunately, we live in a time now where everyone seems to be solely looking ahead, as though we deem nothing in the past worthy of our attention. The future is always fresh and exciting, and it has a pull on us that times past simply can never muster. Yet it may well be that our greatest wealth as human beings can be “discovered” by simply looking behind us.”

Wish You Well. David Baldacci. (Author's Note.) Warner Books, New York, 2000.

The Inside Back Page

On Exploring our History

by Judy Garrett, Heritage Editor

Participant, observer, teacher, recorder, dreamer historians are all of these and, because of their dedication, help create a priceless resource for succeeding generations. Historians and archivists who lived and worked long before we were born left us a rich legacy of words, of art, and of collections which impart a sense of earlier lives and earlier times. It's our responsibility to do the same for those who follow us.

Are there attributes a good historian must have? Insatiable curiosity, dedication, respect, an ability to translate events to words or photos, accuracy and attention to detail, vision, imagination, empathy, and more. Is it the historian's task to evaluate history, to prioritize events? No, the historian's responsibility is to record the details which will allow researchers and future generations to form their own opinions, to make their own analyses, to judge for themselves the lasting significance of the deaths of the Prince of Denmark or the Princess of Wales, to compare the environmental consequences of the eruptions of Mount Etna and Mount St. Helens, to gauge the social impacts of the world's varied political systems, to draw their own conclusions.

Eat Dessert First . . . Life Is Uncertain is the wisdom emblazoned on the bib of a favorite apron, a humorous slogan for a world now comfortable with media sound bites and "in depth" reports which last ninety seconds on network television. Life may, indeed, be uncertain, but history offers us perspective, helps us contrast our era with others, and allows us to look both back in time and forward to the future. As historians, we're continually challenged to collect information, to catalog it, and to establish connections among the thousands of pieces of material we're bombarded with every day which will become the archival collections of tomorrow. It's essential that we do so carefully, impartially, precisely. Our historical society has recently acquired a computer program created specifically for museums to help us catalog the materials now in our collection, and several members of the Sprites are working with our archivist to accomplish that time consuming but critically important project.

We're inspired by the commitment shown by the teenage Sprites and by the third grade students who learn about local history in their classrooms. Dozens of those young students participate in our annual essay contest and, through them, we have had an opportunity to benefit from their research, to share their curiosity, to read their interviews with relatives and neighbors, and to learn about their interests so we can begin to develop new programs which will respond to their ideas and questions.

The Sprites, the third grade students, and other young people in our community will become the historians of the future, the guardians of today's resources and tomorrow's collections. As an organization, we're delighted to know so many local youngsters have an interest in their community, in its history, in the people who have lived here, and in the reasons which brought them to El Cajon and the East County. History is a vital part of all of us, and we're proud to welcome the newest members of our extended family.

Wieghorst Museum Project Moves Closer to Completion

The small home built by the late artist Olaf Wieghorst and moved to its current location on Rea Avenue in October 1999 to become a focal point of the new Olaf Wieghorst Museum and Western Heritage Center, will soon hear the sounds of voices, tools, and machines as the museum's Board of Directors enters into a contract with a construction firm to begin the work necessary before the building can be reoccupied. Tasks will include structural detailing, installation of a new roof, handicap access, and reconstruction of a stone fireplace in the living room. Completion of the house, stable/cantina, landscaping, and the adobe wall around the property are dependent on the Museum

Foundation's continued fund raising activity, member support, and community involvement.

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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Membership Meeting Thursday, April 18, 2002 -- details inside --
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