
Heritage

El Cajon Historical Society Quarterly News

*Volume 24, Issue 1 January
2005*

January Speaker to Share Fun and Facts about the Year's First Month

Which month celebrates the birth dates of Paul Revere, Edgar Allen Poe, Benjamin Franklin, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt? Which month welcomed Alaska, New Mexico, Utah, Kansas, and Michigan to the Union? Which month heard the first transatlantic telephone call and saw this country's first woman governor sworn in to office?

Which month shivered with record low temperatures of -19 in Mississippi (in 1966) and -50 in Nevada (in 1937)? Which month experienced the beginning of California's gold rush?

If you said January, you're right! The first month of the year will be the topic of our January 29th speaker's program as Jeanette Alessio-Way presents one of her entertaining, award winning, programs celebrating the history and culture of a part of our year. Winner of the October 1999 Channel 10 "Leadership of the Month" award, the speaker is known for programs which use historic memorabilia, period art, and antiques to stir the interest of her audiences. She has been complimented for programs which "sparkle with

insight, sensitivity, honesty, and a generous dose of storytelling realism."

Jeanette promises to tell us which coin was issued in January, when beer was first sold in cans, who was featured on the first radio show, what kind of tape was invented in January, who the month was named after, and much more.

The program, which we will co-sponsor with Friends of El Cajon Library, will take place in the library's community room Wednesday, January 29th. The room will open at 11:30 and a box lunch including a sandwich, salad, cookie, and beverage, will be served at 11:45. A registration form for the \$10.00 event is included in this newsletter. Please register early — and invite a friend to join you!

*Historical Society
Celebrates Busy 2002, Looks*

Forward to 30th Anniversary Year

Believe it or not! This year — 2003 — is our organization's 30th year in existence. Since its incorporation in 1973, the El Cajon Historical Society has become a repository for local photos, collections, information, and other materials related to our mission of preserving and promoting the history of the El Cajon area.

We've lovingly refurnished, repainted, and managed the Knox House in a long-term partnership with the City of El Cajon. We've welcomed thousands of visitors, provided hours and hours of information and research assistance, and brought history alive for hundreds of school children who have participated in our annual essay contest.

During 2002, we continued our long tradition of quarterly meetings with excellent programs and with speakers who helped our members and guests expand their understanding of the local area.

We celebrated the East County Rose Society's planting of a rose garden around the gazebo in Judson Park, saw the first of our Knox House window scenes unveiled, and enjoyed the new display opportunities offered by the installation of two hand-crafted wall cabinets in the kitchen.

We explored a number of options for the creation of additional work rooms and storage facilities to accommodate our rapidly growing archival collections. We talked about the need for meeting spaces in which to offer a variety of

programs for adults and children eager to participate in local historical activities.

This year will see continued discussion of those topics plus increasing participation in our annual essay contest, new partnerships with other community organizations, the continuing growth of our archival collection, and a renewed effort to welcome new involvement by local residents.

If you're reading *Heritage* for the first time, we welcome you and encourage you to join us in our efforts. We'd be delighted to have you involved!

Author Offers Thoughts on a Classic American Childhood

Author and newspaper columnist Marilyn Vos Savant has recently published *Growing Up: a Classic American Childhood*, a book written to share her suggestions of what children should know and experience before they turn 18. In it, she refers to a "classic American childhood" as "the childhood most of us wanted for ourselves and never quite experienced, although we knew it existed somewhere just around the corner -- in Mark Twain novels and Frank Capra movies, as well as in our own homes at special moments that we treasure for life."

In an August 2002 article in "Parade" magazine," she listed a number of her suggestions including the following:

♪ Spend a few summer Sunday afternoons lying in the grass and daydreaming alone.

♪ Participate in keeping a family scrapbook with photos and souvenirs of special events.

♪ Walk on stilts, and bounce all over the sidewalk or driveway on a pogo stick.

♪ Run a lemonade stand Bake an apple pie Make old-fashioned fudge

♪ Take a long walk on a local historic trail that leaves you feeling just a little like a time-traveler.

A Look Back

“The first law for the historian is that he shall never dare utter an untruth. The second is that he shall suppress nothing that is true. Moreover, there shall be no suspicion of partiality in his writing, or of malice.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106-43 B.C.

Historic Site Responds to Need for New Technology, New Ways of Reaching Audiences

Managers of a number of our most treasured historic sites are finding that traditional approaches to sharing information may no longer

be serving their audiences. At Mount Vernon, one of the country's oldest visitor attractions, guides have taken note of an appalling decline in what visitors know about George Washington. Blaming it in part on changes in classroom teaching methods and on the increasing demands that teachers include more subjects and more information in their class days, the operators of Mount Vernon have designed a program they hope will call new attention to the nation's first president by humanizing a legend.

Their approach will continue to portray Washington as the respected political leader of his country, but will also present him as the man who was a frontier surveyor, Indian fighter, spy master, and military strategist who oversaw a highly profitable distillery at Mount Vernon. He was an educated man, a successful farmer, and a good husband who fell in love with his best friend's wife.

The Board of Directors at Mount Vernon is well along in its plan to raise \$85 million for a new visitors complex, additional education programs, and an increase in the organization's endowment fund. Among the tools they plan to use in the new programs are holograms, computer imagery, surround-sound audio programs, and a live-action film made by Stephen Spielberg's production company.

“From Honduras to El Cajon”

by Danielle Hiel

Second Place Winner, 2002 Essay Contest

"My fabulous grandmother, Ondina Pineda Hiel, came to live in El Cajon in 1965. Her journey was very unusual because she came from Honduras on a banana ship not speaking a word of English. She met my handsome grandfather, Richard John Hiel, in Tela, Honduras, in 1955. He ran a cattle ranch for the United Fruit Company and my grandmother was a teacher for a local school. They soon fell in love and were married in 1955. My grandfather brought her to California in 1955. These are her thoughts and memories of her journey and new life in El Cajon.

"Soon after my grandparents were married they boarded a banana ship named the White Fleet, and traveled for 5 days until they reached the Port of Houston in Texas. The ship was a banana and passenger ship. They stayed in the officers quarters. When they entered the Gulf of Mexico there was a storm that scared my grandmother. When they reached Houston, they bought a car and started their drive to California. On their way they passed through the Grand Canyon and my grandmother saw snow for the first time. My grandmother said "I was so excited to be in the United States and was ready to start my new life in California."

They lived in San Diego for 9 years before moving to El Cajon. My grandmother said to me, "My first memory of El Cajon was that it was a beautiful valley surrounded by hills and mountains. No wonder this town is called El Cajon (The Box), I remembered thinking. I was

very happy at the thought of living and raising my family here." "We decided to buy a property in El Cajon because you could have horses and raise animals there," she told me. My grandparents wanted my Aunt Deany to have a horse and they also wanted my dad and his brothers to be active in the 4-H Club. They bought their house from a subdivision that used to be where Gillespie Field is now. They moved the house across open land, where Highway 67 is today, down Pepper Drive and up Marlinda Way. Laughingly, my grandmother said, "I remember the house pressing up against the olive and pepper trees that were on Pepper Drive." Their house is at the bottom of Rattle Snake Mountain.

"Shopping was easy in those days," my grandmother said. "We went to Golden West Market on Pepper Drive and Wintergarden Street for food and Sears in downtown San Diego for everything else. When we needed milk, we went to Bright Dairy on First and Pepper Drive and we always bought our eggs from Linden Poultry Ranch on Pepper Drive." I asked my grandma what they did for fun in those days and she said, "Well, we went to the Aero Drive In, where we saw two movies for fifty cents, kids were free, and had ten cent popcorn. The kids always enjoyed the Mother Goose Parade down Main Street. Your Aunt Deany's favorite place was the Bradley Stables, which was where Parkway Plaza is now. Bob Bradley had over a hundred horses there. Your dad, Daniel, Uncle Rick, and Uncle Ed loved going to the El Cajon County Fair. There they would enter their hogs

in the 4-H competitions. The winners would go on to the Del Mar Fair. The fair was held in the area next to the El Cajon Speedway. Summers were as hot then as they are now. All my kids learned how to swim at the Olympic size public pool that was at Gillespie Field. Grandpa said that during W.W. II parachute riggers were trained there. There is now an industry park in the area where the pool was. I sure miss that time."

"My grandma continued working as a teacher in El Cajon. She taught private Spanish classes at Grossmont College and Berlitz Language School. She also was a Spanish teacher for 20 years at the University of San Diego High School. She not only speaks perfect Spanish but perfect English too. On one of her trips to visit Honduras, my fantastic grandmother was asked by her uncle, who was the ambassador to Argentina from Honduras, if she would be interested in being the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Honduras to San Diego. She accepted and on September 3, 1971, the former President of Honduras, Ramon Ernesto Cruz swore her in.

"Honduras will always be important to grandma. On October 4, 1974, she headed a drive for Honduran Relief after Hurricane Fifi struck the Honduran mainland. She is such a beautiful person. She told me how much she loves the United States and is proud to call El Cajon home. In 1982, my grandmother became a citizen of the United States of America. She had been living in El Cajon for already 27 years.

"I asked my grandmother if she could re-live her life, would she want to live somewhere other

than El Cajon? She looked at me, with a smile on her face, and said, "El Cajon is my home. The place where your grandpa and I raised our children happy and free. No, there's no other place where I would rather have lived these last 47 years." Since my grandma always tells the truth, El Cajon must be the greatest place to live."

(When this essay was written last Spring, Danielle was a student in Mrs. Perkins' third grade class at Flying Hills Elementary School.)

Library of Congress' Folklife Center Begins Veterans History Project

"Dispatch," August 2002

American Association for State and Local History

"The Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center has entered into an agreement with the American Folklore Society and the Oral History Association for them to serve as national training partners to the project. The project's mission is to collect and preserve personal accounts, particularly oral history interviews, with military veterans and civilians from World War I, World War II, the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars; and to promote public learning about oral history as an historical methodology. The American Folklore Society and Oral History Association will manage workshops on

conducting interviews, to be offered to community-based groups. They will also coordinate workshop scheduling and leaders.

“The project will forward requests from these groups for workshops to the American Folklore Society and the Oral History Association, who will in turn put selected folklorists and oral historians directly in touch with those groups to make workshop arrangements.

“Partners interested in scheduling workshops or learning more about them should contact David Albee of the Veterans History Project at (202) 707-3410.”

from individual to organization, to Leland and Elouise Barker who have become family members (Leland is a former individual member), and to individual member Ross Nicholson who has become a life member.

We’re sorry to note the deaths of three of our long-time members and supporters: Kathryn McColl Hawkins, Mildred Kennel, and Marion Raishe.

Dorothy also tells us she received a \$500 donation from Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. with a request that we use the money “as we see fit.” What a generous — and unexpected — gift! The Board will be delighted to identify a project we’ll be able to implement, thanks to Wal-Mart’s thoughtfulness.

Membership Chair Welcomes New Members, Announces Recent Gift from Wal-mart

Membership chair Dorothy Baber, on behalf of our Board of Directors, has recently welcomed new family members Teresa and Steve Weschler, Cheri and Vernon Berryman, and Jack and Mae Davis (she was a former individual member as Mae Redfield). Congratulations, also, to new individual member John Linden, to Clark Mires who has changed his membership status

Ancient Order of United Workers Had Intriguing Past, Local Presence

Eldonna Lay’s article in our October 2002 *Heritage* spoke of alcohol prohibition as the number one national social issue during the early years of the 20th century and listed a number of organizations which championed the

cause locally. Among them were familiar ones including the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Woman's Club, and the Presbyterian Church, but the Ancient Order of United Workers was one most of us were not familiar with. Who were they?

The AOUW, founded by 14 Pennsylvania railroad workers in 1868, was the first fraternal insurance company in America. Members paid into an insurance fund to cover the sum of not less than \$500 in benefits paid to a member's dependents when he died. Each time a member died, \$1 was due from the surviving members to reestablish the fund.

The AOUW initially restricted membership to white males employed as mechanics, and barred lawyers, bankers, and proprietors. In 1870, it relaxed its membership restrictions, but continued to exclude lawyers, saloon-keepers, and "the man of wealth who will not invest his capital in some manufacture, so as to give employment to the laboring classes."

Fraternal benefit societies quickly became popular as a means of providing financial protection to working class people at an affordable rate. By 1895, the AOUW claimed more than 318,000 men as members. California's first lodge was established in West Oakland in 1875 and, at its peak, the organization had more than 250 lodges in this state.

Pioneer Mutual Life Insurance Company evolved from the Minnesota AOUW and continues to exist today as a stock subsidiary of American United Mutual Insurance Holding

Company. None of the other lodges are known to remain.

Annual Essay Contest Coming Soon!

Tammy Goodwater, contest chair for the past three years, has agreed to chair this year's Third Grade Essay Contest for us, as well. If you'd like to help read essays or give tours of the Knox later this Spring, please leave a message for Tammy at 444-3800.

The Inside Back Page

Cheers for our Degrees of Involvement

by Judy Garrett, *Heritage* Editor

One of the popular plays and movies of the early 1990s was John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation," an exploration of the theory that all Americans, total strangers or not, are seldom more than six contacts away from any other person in this country. Each of us knows someone . . . who knows someone . . . who knows someone . . .

Guare's story, based on fact, revolved around a young man who talked his way in to the homes of well-known New Yorkers by introducing himself as Sidney Poitier's son and a college friend of their own children. Neither claim was true.

Research into the 'small world' concept dates to 1967 when Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist at Harvard, began a study to see how people utilize their personal networks of friends and acquaintances. Later researchers referred to the experiment as a way of testing the folk theory that every American is just a few handshakes away from knowing the president of the United States. In the 1967 study, Milgram sent 300 letters to randomly selected people, asking each of them to get their letter to a selected person in Boston by using only personal contacts. More than 60 of the letters reached their destination and the researcher was astonished to discover they typically passed through the hands of only five other people.

Subsequent experiments have had similar results.

We see the same serendipitous connections on a more immediate scale in our own community. As an example, two of the Historical Society's past presidents are involved with the Wieghorst Museum which loaned a framed print of one of the late artist's paintings to Friends of the Rancho San Diego Library because of contact made by a Friends member who is also active in Friends of El Cajon Library which will co-sponsor our quarterly meeting later this month hosted by the Historical Society's archivist who is president of the local Friends group.

Regionally and nationally, we feel connected with other historical societies and other preservationists. We cheer their successes and mourn their losses as if they were ours. We understand their dreams and share their experiences. We learn from their efforts and hope they will learn from ours.

Globally, we explore the connections we make with others who may speak different languages and represent different cultural backgrounds but who share the same daily challenges of home and homeland.

Television and the Internet have made it remarkably easy to establish connections among the people of the world, to talk to each other in real time, to view some of our similarities and our differences, and to condense the degrees of separation with a few key strokes or the click of a remote control. A

personal goal for the new year will be to continue to reach out to new people, to explore new ideas, to learn new things. How else will I know who might be just a handshake . . . or two . . . or three . . . or four . . . away!

“Curiosity is Peaked”

“The prepared mind notices when something doesn’t go as expected, and curiosity is piqued by observation. You can encourage and teach young people to observe, to ask questions when unexpected things happen. You can teach yourself not to ignore the unanticipated.” Patsy O. Sherman, developer of Scotchgard fabric stain repellent, offered those thoughts at the recent celebration of the United States Patent and Trademark Office’s 200th anniversary. Scotchgard, she said, was a discovery resulting from an attempt to develop a rubbery material resistant to deterioration from aircraft fuels. She and a colleague spilled a few drops of one of the experimental compounds and found they had created a new substance which repelled both water and oil.

Knox House Museum hours:

*12:30 - 3:30 p.m. Saturdays
or by appointment.*

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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— details inside —