
Heritage

El Cajon Historical Society Quarterly News

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2005*

Organization Bursting with Ideas, Bursting at the

Seams! “No room. No room!” Like the Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland believed of their table, the Knox House and its little office are simply too small to accommodate the growing collections of materials we’re asked to maintain and the growing number of services we’re asked to provide. Students and teachers, descendants of local families, researchers, and a variety of others want to use our files and our collections in their search for information about East County’s history. New residents want to visit our house museum to learn about the community. Long-time neighbors want to leave their collections to an organization which can provide the security, the protection, and the respect they deserve.

Unlike Alice, though, we cannot look about and insist “There’s plenty of room!” We’re terribly squeezed for space to continue our most basic work and equally squeezed for space to begin new activities — quilting, story telling, workshops, crafts, lectures, children’s programs, and others — which would offer our local residents exciting new opportunities to be more involved in their community.

The Board has discussed a number of options including an additional structure adjacent to the Knox House, an idea impossible because of utility easements still in place, a carryover from the time Judson Park and the Knox were on the same piece of property and Park Avenue curved sharply behind the house to intersect with Magnolia.

We’re eager to talk to current members and to recruit new members who will be able to help us solve the dilemma. What do we need, and why? Where do we need it? How will we obtain it, and when? Are there friends and partners in the community who would like to help? Please share your ideas with a Board member, send us a letter, make a phone call, and offer to be part of the solution! Share this newsletter with acquaintances who are not now members of the Historical Society. Ask them to give us their thoughts, their energy, and to help us continue our mission of preserving and promoting the history of the El Cajon area, its historical structures and artifacts.

Too difficult, you say? Not so! As the Queen in Alice’s Adventures told her young visitor, “Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Musical Afternoon to Draw Fans to Prescott Promenade Sunday, July 27th

Prescott Promenade, on Main Street just east of Magnolia Avenue, will again be the setting for the Historical Society's Summer band concert, a long and enjoyable tradition of music under the trees. We moved the program from Judson Park to Prescott Promenade last year because of the increasing traffic and noise on Magnolia Avenue and, although we lost the connection with that lovely little park and its beautiful gazebo, found the afternoon much more relaxing.

The San Diego City Guard Band, still under the direction of our own Gene Vacher, will be featured at the concert and will be joined by the La Mesa City Limits barbershop quartet, a popular addition to last year's schedule.

The City Guard Band, organized in the mid-1880s by musician and tireless promoter Jack Dodge, first manager of the Spreckels Theater, is a fond part of San Diego history.

Gene Vacher has played and taught music for more than eighty years, locally and throughout the world. He's a familiar face not only to us but to the El Cajon Rotary Club where he and

Elizabeth Montgomery lead the club in its musical interlude every Tuesday afternoon.

Members of the La Mesa City Limits barbershop quartet have sung together for years, entertaining at hundreds of locations including Disneyland, Qualcomm stadium, the Gaslamp Quarter, schools, hospitals, community events, and more.

Bring your lawn chairs or bring cushions for the park benches, get out the sunscreen and the sun hats, gather your friends, and plan to join us on the 27th from 4:30 until 7:00. Many of the restaurants along Main Street will be open and more than happy to pack an early dinner for you to enjoy during the concert.

Friendly Competition Sparks Summer Membership Drive

Since its founding in 1973, the El Cajon Historical Society has taken an active role as a protector of local history and a promoter of the many unique people and features in the East

County. We now sponsor an eagerly awaited annual home tour, an annual essay contest which this year attracted almost 300 participating third grade students, and a beautiful rose garden at the Judson Park gazebo which is lovingly maintained for us by members of the East County Rose Society. Our research and reference materials are used by hundreds of people each year and the Knox House enjoys a steady stream of guests eager to visit and learn about El Cajon's first commercial building.

Plans during the next year include the continuation of those activities plus the addition of a contest to select appropriately historic paint colors to cover the Knox's exterior paint now showing the signs of wind and weather. We'll also continue our discussion of the need for additional activity space and try to reach consensus on use, size, location, and other critical issues.

It will be an active, exciting year and the Board has endorsed a Summer membership drive with prizes for the current members who bring in the most new partners for our activities. New people, new ideas, new energy — we welcome them all!

The membership campaign will begin with your receipt of this newsletter and end September 30th. The committee will tally the "referred by" information on all new applications and will announce the names of the recruiting champions at our annual meeting in October.

The prize for the person bringing in the greatest number of new members will be a deliciously authentic period dinner for six at the Knox House, cooked and served by Eldonna Lay

and several other talented Board members. Second prize will be four passes to the San Diego Zoo plus two cuddly stuffed animals for the children or grandchildren who enjoy the outing with the ticket recipient.

Encourage someone you know — neighbors, local students and teachers, church or club friends, anyone you know who has an interest in local history — to join our growing organization. Write your name on the "referred by" line of the enclosed application and give it to someone today! Copies of the form are perfectly acceptable. Or, call the Knox House at 444-3800 for more applications.

(Editor's note: if you're someone reading this newsletter for the first time and want to join the organization, please feel free to "refer" yourself -- we look forward to your participation!)

292 Third Grade Students Join the Fun in this Year's Annual Essay Contest

Almost 300 young people researched local events, interviewed friends and relatives, studied El Cajon history, and submitted essays in this year's annual essay contest. Done in

conjunction with the local history segment of the third grade curriculum since 1982, the competition has taught children and their classmates many new facts about their community, helped them learn research skills and interviewing techniques, and brought many new additions to the Historical Society archives.

We salute all of the students (and their teachers, named in parentheses) for their hard work, their enthusiasm, and their accomplishments!

☆ First Place Essay Award

Liesl Oestreicher – Rancho San Diego (Goe)

☆ Second Place Essay Award

Nicholas Smith – Vista Grande (Pear)

☆ Third Place Essay Award

Robyn Malette – Blossom Valley (Halligan)

☆ Fred and Nettie Kersten Award

Emilee Boland – Rios (Brooks)

☆ Virginia Stead Award

Matthew Thornton – Vista Grande (Baker)

☆ Heritage Award

Jasmine Amado – Cuyamaca (Stone)

☆ Neatness Award

Beatriz De La Cruz – Chase (Caruso)

Mirna Farhat – Flying Hills (Meshna)

☆ Originality Award

Nick Ruppert – Avocado (Lieberknecht)

Joey Southworth – Flying Hills (Perkins)

☆ Research Award

Matthew Williams – Blossom Valley (Moody)

Caleb Adkins – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Ryan Vermillion – Flying Hills (Perkins)

Conner Clark – Vista Grande (Johnson)

Shane Dillon – Vista Grande (Pear)

Kera McIntire – Vista Grande (Saltzstein)

☆ Best of School Award

Taylor Shakowski – Avocado (Senninger)

Shelley Valladares – Ballantyne (Tiegs)

Mikayla Duchene – Blossom Valley (Simpson)

Andrew Tran – Chase (Caruso)

Jack Gates – Crest (Charles/Rothlisberger)

Rabla Said – Cuyamaca (Stone)

Dominic Maniscalco – Flying Hills (Perkins)

Carly Hines – Fuerte (Kern)

Daniel Starwalt – W.D. Hall (Bocker)

Michelle Miller – Madison (Levine)

Dylan Stewart – Magnolia (Soto)

William Speegle – Rancho San Diego (Goe)

Kimberly Angquico – Rios (Jokerst)

Alyssa Reynolds – Vista Grande (Pear)

☆ Honorable Mention Award

Dana Wardell – Avocado (Lieberknecht)

Bilah Heartfield – Ballantyne (Van Slayke)

Dougie Fordyce – Flying Hills

(Anderson/Rice)

Mary Lieberknecht – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Alana Vieira – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Evora Thomas – Flying Hills (Meshna)

Rebekah Trussler – Flying Hills (Meshna)

Joseph Barron – W.D. Hall (Bocker)

Bryan Hart – W.D. Hall (Schultheis)

Shelley Copeland – Madison (Levine)

Michael Eller – Vista Grande (Byers)

Carly McKim – Vista Grande (Byers)

Loryn Posladek – Vista Grande (Byers)

Dallas Sheehan – Vista Grande (Saltzstein)

Paul Tominna – Vista Grande (Saltzstein)

 Watch for this year's top three essays in the October, January, and April issues of *Heritage*.

“What is History?” Not a Simple Question, Not a Simple Answer!

One of the thought provoking questions asked during this year's essay contest related to the definition of history. What is it, exactly? Is it different for an eight year old than for an eighty year old? Should there be special guidelines for an essay contest judged by an historical society?

At the request of Tammy Goodwater, chair of our annual contest, the Board of Directors discussed the question and discovered a surprising fact. Unlike “antique” which is often defined by terms such as ancient, belonging to a distant past, or more than 100 years old, definitions of the word “history” are not marked by such specific words. Instead, we find “history” called a chronological record of significant events, the aggregate of past events, and the continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future. The Greek word “historia” is translated as an account of one's inquiries. And, we are reminded by another source, the content of history always reflects the interests of the age in which it is written.

So, in answer to the question, the Board chose not to designate a time frame, instead allowing each participant to choose his or her own definition of history. Many students selected topics related to early El Cajon while others researched and wrote about people, events, and businesses whose place on the calendar has been much more recent. All of the essays provided valuable learning experiences for the children, increased their knowledge of local people and events, and helped them, in the finest Greek tradition, to prepare accounts of their inquiries. We're proud to have been partners in that process.

Thoughts to Ponder . . .

“Our responsibility, as keepers of history (I like the strength of that British term keeper instead of the Latin curator), is to communicate meaning to the best of our abilities. That means we must be aware of subtle coding inherent in words and phrases we use to describe the past.

The truth never changes, but our human frailty in trying to see and describe the truth must be constantly monitored.”

Fred Reenstjerna, Cataloging Librarian
Douglas County Library System,
Roseburg, Oregon

“Done well, interpretation helps audiences connect with the past in personal ways by drawing on first-person accounts of human activity. The best interpretive programs are well organized, based on sound historical research, and have clear objectives. They are tailored to diverse audiences and ways of learning. While keeping education at the forefront, they let audiences draw their own conclusions about the past. With interpretive programs, we play the ancient and honorable role of storyteller. When we tell stories well, no matter whether our organization is large or small, we know we are carrying out our mission.”

Timothy C. Glines and David Grabitske
Minnesota Historical Society
St. Paul, Minnesota

“Over the last few decades, history has become much more inclusive in its presentation. The voices of women, African-Americans, and various ethnic minorities, unheard in previous generations, are now a part of the mainstream of historical interpretation. Unpleasant aspects of the past bear the full light of scrutiny. History is now looked at from many perspectives. It makes our jobs more challenging, especially when the public looks at the past from different points of view. “My” history may seem different from “your” history, making it not unlike conflicting perspectives on current events.”

Charles F. Bryan, Jr.
Virginia Historical Society
Richmond, Virginia

Misguided Guide Book Contributes to Tragic Winter for 1846's Donner Party

In a March 9, 2003, Sunday Oregonian article titled “Errant advice upstages dreams of Western empire,” Portland columnist John Terry relayed the heartbreaking story of the Donner Party and its misplaced trust in a soon discredited travel book.

Ohio lawyer, traveler, and political aspirant Lansford W. Hastings wrote the 150-page *Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* in 1845. According to Terry, “it’s a curious compilation. In his short tenures in both Oregon and California he couldn’t have had time to visit all the areas he reports in detail.

“For each area he sets forth detailed descriptions of the landscape, geology, plant life, native inhabitants and other vital information. In many cases he’s wildly off the base and never says where he got his information.

“In April 1846, 89 emigrants left Springfield, Illinois, for California. They adopted Hastings’ book as their guide and supposedly arranged for him to meet them in August at Fort Bridger to escort them across the Utah desert.

“Hastings for some reason took off before they arrived at the fort, and they proceeded without him. They immediately went off course and took 18 days to make 39 miles across the Wasatch Range. More time was lost slogging across the Salt Desert, a quagmire of clay, salt and mud.

“Once free of the desert, the group followed streams Hastings indicated would lead to the Humboldt River. They didn’t. October 28 found them high in the Sierra Nevada. An early, heavy snowstorm moved in, blocking their way.

“Only 45 members of the Donner Party managed to survive . . .

“Hastings maintained he’d left word at Fort Bridger that it was too late in the season to continue and to stay put until spring. The survivors vehemently held otherwise. His connection to the disaster was widely publicized. His and his book’s reputation were dashed in consequence.

“Apparently undaunted, Hastings practiced law in California, preached separatism, balked at statehood, was elected to the State Convention in Monterey in 1849 and sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War.

“After the War he traveled to Brazil and published his *Emigrants’ Guide to Brazil*. He died in 1870 while on a voyage to Brazil with a shipload of colonists.”

The Inside Back Page

Wasn't it just yesterday . . . ?

by Judy Garrett, *Heritage* Editor

"Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly fly the years.
One season following another."

(from "Fiddler on the Roof")

El Cajon and the East County grew breathtakingly fast, particularly during the years just after World War II when thousands of soldiers and sailors chose to stay in the warm Southern California sunshine after their release from the military. El Cajon, a tiny agricultural community incorporated in 1912 by a handful of electors, grew slowly until the 1950s, then saw a period of explosive growth. By 1960, the city's population had jumped to 37,618 and the original square mile had become almost nine. Today, we have more than 95,000 residents in a 14.1 square mile area and have little vacant land left for new development.

A fascinating exhibit to have on display for guests at the Knox House would be a history tracing the city's growth. When were various sections of today's community added to the existing city? What prompted the annexations? How easy were they to accomplish? Was there any opposition? Were there other areas which could have — or should have, or might have — been annexed, as well? The exhibit could include a series of map overlays and could become a conversation piece for adults as well as for our many visiting school children.

Our neighboring cities have flourished, too. La Mesa, incorporated the same year El Cajon was, has a current population of approximately 55,000. Santee, an incorporated city only since 1980, is almost as large. Lemon Grove has 25,000 people. In the unincorporated area, Rancho San Diego claims more than 19,000 residents and Alpine, once a tiny village in the hills, has another 16,000 or so.

In an era of such exuberant growth, it's easy to lose the sense of community which made each of our community histories unique. What roles were played by the early Kumeyaay residents? The Spanish missionaries? Doña María Antonio Estudillo? Railroads and gold miners? The military? Amaziah Knox and Ed Fletcher? George Cowles and Milton Santee? And, what roles are played by the people creating history today? How will researchers two or two hundred years from now regard us and our role in local history?

As president of our historical society a few years ago, I fantasized about converting the old Grossmont High School into a repository for East County archival collections. The site which has meant so much to so many people in this area could become a research center for all of us and our shared

histories, allowing us to pool resources, to store collections too large for our local organizations to house, and to provide centralized research facilities.

A dream? Today, the building is still needed by the school district for its administrative facilities but, as the Queen told Alice, "... sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Home Tour Thanks . . .

Bea Heyenga, committee chair for this year's wonderfully successful home tour, credits much of the event's success to the many volunteers who helped as greeters and hosts for the property owners who opened their homes, gardens, and hearts to guests.

Thanks to Ellen Anderson, Art Ballantyne, Jane Bender, Jo Anne Burns, Jim Graves, Fran Hill, Christy and Joe Klock, Eldonna and Richard Lay, Carlotta Nordall, Carla Nowak, Lou Toth, and Sharon Vowles. Special appreciation to Bob Hattrup for design of the publicity flyers and to Jim Graves and Joe Klock for flyer distribution and other kind assistance whenever needed.

_____ The committee is already thinking about sites and attractions for next year's tour. Thanks,

Bea!

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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— for MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION, please visit the museum or call us at (619) 444-3800 —

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Summer Band Concert
Sunday, July 27, 2003
— details inside —