



## President's Message

### Police station tour highlights July 19 meeting

Dear Members & Friends of ECHS,

Your Co-Vice Presidents Jonna Waite and Joe Klock have made arrangements for us to tour the new El Cajon Police Station for our Quarterly Meeting July 19. (*See back page for more information.*) It is important that you make a reservation early. Lunch will be a catered "brown-bag" and we do not want anyone to miss out. We all enjoyed El Cajon Detective Walt Miller's program at our January Quarterly Meeting and, as promised, he will be our tour guide.

#### **A WORD OF THANKS**

A big thank you to Sandi Byrd and Sharon Jarboe who helped research homes in El Cajon to ascertain which homes are more than 100 years old.

And thank you to the recently dissolved El Cajon Women's Club for sending their remaining funds of \$1,413.42 to the ECHS

#### **CHILDREN'S ESSAY CONTEST**

ECHS celebrated the 31st Annual Third Grade Essay Program June 4 at the Ronald Reagan Community Center. (*See pages 2-3.*) It was very gratifying to welcome a standing room only conference room filled with students, parents, teachers and friends. Several ECHS members dressed in appropriate costume for the late 1800's were available to greet and pose for pictures with children and family.

This year we celebrated the City of El Cajon's 100th Anniversary with a special award for an Essay referring to the 1912-2012 Centennial. I was honored to present the El Cajon Historical Centennial Trophy and a Certificate of Commendation from Senator Joel Anderson to Alexis Haynes, a student from Fuerte School. Her teacher is Mrs. Buehl. It was a wonderful evening for the students and their parents thanks to

Essay Contest Chairperson Alice Rodriguez and her many helpers. The evening concluded with cookies and punch.

#### **FOND FAREWELL**

We will miss long-time member Bea Heyenga who passed away April 23 at the age of 90. Bea was the greatest. When we had a home tour, she would be out early putting up signs for the public – and those chocolate brownies with mini-marshmallows on top. Fond memories.

#### **EL CAJON'S BIRTHDAY**

The City of El Cajon will officially celebrate the Centennial Anniversary on Monday, November 12, 2012. Plans are underway for a huge birthday party that will include many friends and organizations in the city including the El Cajon Historical Society. Save that date. Join us and share the fun.

*Fran*



*The Downtown El Cajon & Arts Alley Gallery Walk 2012 held a Fiber Arts exhibit at the Knox House on June 16. The next walk will be held October 26.*

# 31ST ANNUAL Third Grade Essay Contest Awards



*Josephine Asher aka Frances Parsons Hill assisted by Minnie Harris aka Alice Rodriguez presented Alexis Hayes from Fuerte Elementary the first place award. Above right, Alexis also won the Rexford L. Hall Memorial Trophy for her school, bestowed by Hall's descendant Richard Hall.*

*At right, Calista Dicker from Fuerte, who received the 2nd Place award for her essay on Amaziah Lord Knox, posed with him, aka Bob Nowak and Illa Birdseye, aka Jonna Waite.*



*Above, Cowboy Jim Daniels awarded the Olaf Wieghorst Award to Baden Gloyer from Fuerte.*



*Above, Charles Brown of Viejas presented the Judges Award to Cole McDonough from Bostonia.*



*At right, Stephen Mahoney from El Cajon Valley School District gave the Third Place Award to Indiana Schaefer from Fuerte.*



*Illa Birdseye aka Jonna Waite presented the Heritage Award to Zubayda Abdiqadir.*

*Portraying characters from the El Cajon's past, ECHS members posed with students attending the awards ceremony.*



*The awards presentation provided a photo opportunity for parents and others.*



## 2012 Third Grade Essay Contest Winners

PRIZE	STUDENT	ESSAY TITLE	SCHOOL
1st - Centennial	Alexis Haynes	1912 to 2012	Fuerte Elementary
2nd	Calista Dicker	The Contributions of Amaziah Lord Knox	Fuerte Elementary
3rd	Indiana Schaefer	The Trains of El Cajon	Fuerte Elementary
Nettie Kersten	Saige Wilbur	A Family Tradition	Flying Hills Elementary
Virginia Stead	Aubrie Sobczak	Geology of El Cajon	Bostonia Elementary
Heritage	Zubayda Abdiqadir	My Own Story	Avocado School
Olaf Wieghorst	Baden Gloyer	Olaf Wieghorst: Dean of Western Painters	Fuerte Elementary
Honorable Mention	Laura Ardilla	Apolinaria Lorenzana	Rancho San Diego Elem.
Honorable Mention	Isabel Basilio	The Knox Hotel	Rancho San Diego Elem.
Judges Award	Cole McDonough	Kumeyaay Indians	Bostonia Elementary
Originality	Sophia Hirasuna	Signs of Meaning	Vista Grande Elementary
Neatness	Saul Barragan	A Look at El Cajon's Past: Museums Wieghorst and Knox	Chase Elementary

## Best of School Awards

SCHOOL	STUDENT	ESSAY TITLE
Avocado School	Owen Silva	Circle Preschool
Bostonia Elementary	Kaylei Terrones	My Great Grandmother: A Pioneer of El Cajon
Chase Elementary	Jolie Birdsong	Gold Mining in El Cajon
Flying Hills Elementary	Madison Shephard	Knox Museum
Fuerte Elementary	Leeann Hammers	Old El Cajon
W.D. Hall Elementary	William Slavey	The Knox House and Hotel
Lexington Elementary	Lidice Medina	A Blast in the Past
Naranca Elementary	Nimuhe Garcia	The History of El Cajon "Clothes"
Rancho San Diego Elem.	Trevor Thompson	Prehistoric Times in the Valley of El Cajon
Vista Grande Elementary	Julianna Maayaa	El Cajon Fire Department

The winning essays are posted at <http://elcajonhistory.org> (under "Education") and will be included in upcoming issues of this newsletter. *Disclaimer:* ECHS makes every effort to make available accurate information for historical research. Students use a variety of sources. Third grade essays should not be used for research.



## Curator's Report

# Donor gives museum early 1900s school desk

Thanks to the generosity of recent donor Kathy Fiedor, the Knox House Museum has a cast-iron-and-wood school desk with two fore-and-aft fold-down seats from the early 1900s. They are now installed beneath our 1880s school map of Southern California in our upstairs museum room. Soon, they will be accompanied by a small book shelf holding early readers, textbooks, and other early school-related objects.

What we don't yet have is a glass-and-stopper ink "jar" to insert into the desk's open inkwell. We could also use a few small elementary school textbooks published before 1925 on any subject and in good condition. Anyone wanting to donate these items is encouraged to call Curator Eldonna Lay at 619-442-8782 to establish times for donations to be brought to the museum at the southwest corner of Park at Magnolia Avenue.

In May, the ECHS Curator addressed the El Cajon Chamber of Commerce's Leadership class in the museum at the Barona reservation. Each year, members of the Leadership class are provided a lecture on the history of the early settlement of El Cajon along with a video tour of the Knox House. They also receive information on the history of local Indians – this year at Barona's small-but-wonderful museum

Earlier, the Curator told third and fourth grade students in the auditorium at W.D. Hall School

about children's lives on the East County frontier. Her talk, photos and objects centered upon information provided by former member Eugene Vacher about his and his teacher mother's family – the Ashers.

Among his mother's (Josephine) brothers and sisters were professional musicians, early University of California at Berkley professors, land developers along San Diego's beach communities, and her famous brother Robert – historically known as the artist and author "hermit of Palomar."

Their parents, Josephus and Sarah Asher, were early developers/owners of a large fruit ranch on land now occupied by Westfield Parkway Plaza on Fletcher Parkway. They won international acclaim when their daughter, Josephine (Eugene's mother) won recognition for her techniques in raising and curing raisin grapes when presented with the first prize at the 1893 Chicago's World Columbian Exposition.

## Book club tackles varying titles

We are still reading! Some of the books have been gritty stories and we look forward to reading something more light-hearted. Recently we completed *The Kitchen House* and are in the process of reading *One Thousand White Women*, *The Journals of May Dodd*, by Jim Fergus. We'll discuss it on July 11.

Since the beginning of the Knox Readers History Book Club, at least 18 books have been completed with some varying titles shared by the group. Our focus is titles of a historical nature, but readers have not been limited by scope.

New readers are welcome to join us. We meet at 2 p.m. every other month on the 2nd Wednesday at the Knox House Museum.

## Red Hats to visit Knox House Museum

A group of ladies from the Red Hat Society is planning a special tour of the Knox House in July.

If you belong to a group who would like to arrange a special tour of the museum, please contact us at 619-444-3800.

## Board gets house ducting repaired

The heating and air conditioning system at the Knox House has been repaired. All the ducting under the house has been replaced and other leaks in the system have been repaired so it is now working much more efficiently. This will surely be appreciated as we head into summer.

# The Corona Hotel 1886 - 1920

by G. Carroll Rice

Times were good! The Southern California Land Boom was in full bloom in the mid-1880's when Mrs. Anna Stough Knowles conceived the idea of a modern first-class hotel in the midst of the action. Mrs. Knowles was the daughter of Oliver J. Stough, a man of wealth who had made fortunes in real estate from Pacific Beach to Burbank; and it's a good bet that he was a silent partner in her 'hospitality' enterprise. With money at hand, she purchased ten acres on the north side of Main Street at Magnolia, directly across the street from Amaziah Knox's workaday El Cajon Hotel built ten years earlier.

In 1885, Mrs. Knowles engaged premier architects James and Merritt Reid, who were designing and building the luxurious Hotel Del Coronado for Mr. E. S. Babcock, to design her dream hostelry. Fully reflecting the Late Victorian/Queen Anne styling and occupying a ground space of 40 by 110 feet, the all-wood El Cajon Corona Hotel offered 40 public and private rooms designed to appeal to a genteel clientele.

The three-story structure featured an open first floor roofed veranda for walks around the building and access to offices and shops. As time went by those professional and commercial accommodations would include doctors' offices, a barber shop that offered hot and cold baths, a drugstore, real estate sales offices, a motion picture company headquarters, and a popular billiard parlor.

Balconies on the second and third floors gave guests views of the passing parades of people, carriages, wagons, and, later, those new-fangled automobiles on Main Street. On the roof, a 'sky veranda' and a spacious cupola observation tower offered visitors and prospective land buyers unobstructed views all the way to the mountains. Completing the picture, a jaunty weather vane atop the cupola reached 75 feet above the ground and responded to the prevailing breezes.

Lodgings for overnight and long-term guests included five bedrooms on the third floor, 20 on the second floor, and six on the ground or main floor. The public facilities

encompassed a dining room that was famous for its savory chicken dinners, the City Club Room (a venue for community and civic meetings), a spacious ballroom to host community dances, and, for the men, an impressive grand saloon.

There was no central heating, but warmth was provided by open fireplace grates, strategically located on each floor. Seven brick chimneys along the back side of the hotel, five rising from the ground and two rising from the second floor, served the heating system. It wasn't until 1911 that electricity became available in the El Cajon Valley and, presumably, to the Corona.

Although electric power was eventually installed in the hotel, a sewage system was years away, which resulted in the installation of a privy behind the hotel. Excavations of that privy area in 1992 proved that it was

also used for the disposal of refuse and garbage. The collection of trash and discarded artifacts from the pit gave archeologists intimate insights into life in El Cajon in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

When the hotel opened in 1886, the demand for Southern California land was at its peak. Basking in its heady atmosphere, the hotel flourished as land companies, such as the El

Cajon Land Company and Pacific Coast Land Bureau, brought thousands of prospective buyers by carriage, and after 1889 by train, into the valley.

By 1890, with California's business climate slipping into the doldrums, Anna Stough Knowles wisely sold the hotel and moved to La Jolla, later opening the Vienna bakery and dining room at Fourth and F Streets in downtown San Diego.

In spite of the prosperous operation in its earliest years, it appears that the hotel suffered from management problems, and by 1892, Amaziah Knox had assumed the reins, adding the operation of the Corona to his continued management of his original El Cajon Hotel. Some time in this period the property title was acquired by the

*(continued on page 6)*



*Photo shows Main Street, looking east, prior to 1900*

# The Corona Hotel *(continued from page 5)*

Pacific Coast Land Bureau of San Francisco and they closed a portion of the hotel. Social notes in the El Cajon Valley News indicated that organizations met and dined at the Knox but went across the street to dance in the Corona's ballroom.

The Corona underwent a major renovation in March 1899 when its San Francisco owners rented the building to J. D. Rush who, at this time, was managing the El Cajon Hotel for Amaziah Knox who wanted to retire to ranching. Paint, structural repairs, and even a new windmill and pumping system promised first class accommodations at the re-opening. In his initial advertising, Mr. Rush stated that the Corona would now offer better stabling for animals, display rooms had been added for the use of traveling salesmen, and excellent meals would continue to be available for 25 cents.

For the next 20 years, the Corona Hotel was the center of public activity in the El Cajon Valley. Management and ownership changed several more times as the prosperity of the mid-1880's faded into memory. In 1908 the Corona became the property of W.T. Munger, who bequeathed it to his daughter, Louisa Starr in 1911. Even then, the aging Corona held her own as the new century blossomed and the world swirled into an era of unparalleled sophistication.

During those sparkling, late 'teen days when motion pictures were new and hadn't yet found voices, the Corona housed the office of the El Cajon Valley Film Company. Its manager, John Filson, not only directed the company's productions but was available to train and coach aspiring motion picture actors two days a week. (The fee for such training is not mentioned.) Hotel rooms and the Corona, itself, frequently appeared in films between 1911 and 1920 when valley locations were popular with the pioneer motion picture companies. El Cajon came close, but eventually lost out to a place called Hollywood.

Still time had taken its toll, and by 1920, Mrs. Starr, a former city clerk, had listed the hotel on the market at \$15,000 and, anticipating the sale, rented it to Mr. W. C. Houghton on a month-to-month basis.

December 14, 1920, must have been chilly, for around 8 p.m. Mr. Houghton removed the covering from an unused heating grate on the northeast side of the building. Unaware that instead of repairing its damaged chimney, a previous manager had simply closed it off, he started a fire that ignited the building's exposed wooden framework and spread across the upper floor.

Guests in upstairs rooms quickly realized the futility of tossing pitchers of water on the blazing fire and began to evacuate. The alarm was sounded and the El Cajon fire company arrived quickly, but their equipment was totally inadequate against a fire of this magnitude. Unable to produce enough water pressure to do any good, the local firemen called for help from La Mesa and San Diego.

Both departments responded, but by the time they arrived, flames had already spread through the entire building. The heat generated by the fire was so intense that buildings across the street (among them the new Lyons Building at the northeast corner) were scorched and their windows were beginning to crack and fall. Water from La Mesa's new pumper truck and San Diego's Unit No. 4 was used not only to fight the fire, but more importantly, to cool the neighboring buildings and spray the overheated firemen.

By 10 p.m., the once magnificent Corona Hotel was gone. Fortunately, the fire had started on the upper stories, and the alarm had been given in time for the 40 or more occupants, including some children, to retrieve what they could of their property and escape uninjured.

The community had met the emergency well, rallying at the first sounds of the alarm and helped rescue as much hotel furniture and other property as possible. Within the two-hour period, a kitchen was set up in the Veterans Hall to serve coffee and snacks to the firefighters. The building had been insured for \$3,000 plus an additional \$500 for Mrs. Starr's personal items, but the loss of property by the guests, mostly men working on road improvements, was uninsured.

After the fire there were those who shrugged their shoulders and commented that an old wooden building, dry as tinder, could be expected to burn down sooner or later. The Corona, however, was far more than an old wooden building; it was a structure in the grand design that brought a sense of pride and permanence to El Cajon residents and business owners. The valley's first doctor, A. L. Derbyshire, had opened his office and later the first pharmacy, in it. The first available hot and cold baths were offered in the hotel barber shop at a time when few families had bathing facilities at home. The community would long miss its ballroom, the promenades on its roof and the handsome observation tower so loved by visitors and enthusiastic real estate salesmen for the stunning views of the valley's rich agricultural heritage and dawning potential.

---

**Reference notes  
on the Corona Hotel  
are available at  
[www.elcajonhistory.org](http://www.elcajonhistory.org)**

---

Probably the most significant series of meetings ever held in the Corona took place in the Fall of 1912 when a petition to incorporate a village called 'The Corners' into a new city to be named El Cajon was being prepared for the County Board of Supervisors. After it was submitted and certain boundary adjustments made, the Board of Supervisors gave its approval and set an election date for November 12, 1912. The residents approved the plan and elected James B. Harris, J. B. Rumsey, William Stell, Dr. Charles R. Knox, and George French to a board of Trustees. The Trustees held their first meeting in the Corona's City Club Room and appointed James B. Harris as President of the Board; the positions of City Clerk and Treasurer were filled by store owner Leo T. Meachum and O. B. Avis.

Many times in the past I have looked at old photographs of El Cajon and have been confused by seeing the Corona's cupola rising above the horizon. I wasn't quite sure what it was, but now I can see in its vanished elegance the symbol of the faith men and women once had in the future of this valley we call home . . . a monumental pointer toward what the City of El Cajon became and continues to be in a Valley of Opportunity.

## Newsletter to contain useful household hints from 1883

Thanks to ECHS member Helen Nelson, the Heritage will begin running excerpts from the 1883 "Mrs. Owens' Cook Book and Useful Hints for the Household" in its October issue.

## From the Montgomery Ward Christmas Catalog 1934

**Day Old Chicks**  
25 for \$1.90

Standard Quality Light Mixed Breed

More Poultry Dollars with Wards Chicks			
Priced as for personal live delivery and satisfactory guarantee. All breeds developed by Standard American Methods of Application. See Wards Southern White Hatching. For Best Parameters see Wards General Catalog. Superior Quality. They have the finest bodies and legs, long, pointed and active legs, ability. Absolutely reliable and guaranteed pure-bred. All birds are vaccinated against cholera.			
257 PR. 1101	25 Chicks	50 Chicks	100 Chicks
General	\$2.50	\$4.95	\$9.90
General	3.99	6.15	9.75
1/2 Rhode Island State	3.99	6.15	9.75
Buff Oringtons	3.75	6.25	10.00
White Wyandottes	3.75	6.25	10.00
Light Mixed Breeds	2.80	4.75	9.00
Heavy Mixed Breeds	2.75	4.50	8.50
Standard Quality - Fine quality of high quality and good, healthy quality birds and well known hatching with a reputation for hatching quality chicks. All birds from our country. Packed.			
257 PR. 1102	25 Chicks	50 Chicks	100 Chicks
General	\$1.99	\$3.98	\$7.96
General	2.99	4.19	7.79
1/2 Rhode Island State	2.99	4.19	7.79
Buff Oringtons	2.99	4.19	7.79
White Wyandottes	2.99	4.19	7.79
Light Mixed Breeds	1.90	3.75	7.40
Heavy Mixed Breeds	1.85	3.60	7.20

Prices Subject to Change Without Notice.



April's quarterly meeting featured a presentation on San Diego's milk bottles by Ken Gallo & Frank Pekarek of the San Diego Antique Bottle & Collectibles Club.



## Welcome New Members

J.E. & Sandra Byrd  
Bob Gardner  
Landis Lee Bender II & Anamaria Jappe  
David & Robin Lakin, Sunburst Pool Service  
Alexis Haynes  
Calista Dicker  
Indiana Schaefer

## El Cajon Historical Society Board

President ..... Fran Hill  
Vice Presidents ..... Joe Klock, Jonna Waite  
Treasurer ..... George Dall  
Recording Secretary ..... Carla Nowak  
Curator ..... Eldonna Lay  
Archivist ..... Fran Hill  
Office Manager ..... Mary Saxton  
Maintenance ..... Rick Hall  
Membership ..... Christy Klock  
Budget Chair ..... Joe Klock  
Esayay Contest Chair ..... Alice Rodriguez  
Centennial Representative .... Bonnie Fredensborg  
Heritage Editor ..... Anita Tinsley  
Members at Large ..... Ellen Anderson  
Richard Lay, G. Carroll Rice, Karna Webster

El Cajon Historical Society  
P. O. Box 1973  
El Cajon, CA 92022

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 154  
EL CAJON, CA 92020

*Return Service Requested*

---

---

***In the next issue...***

- The Winning Essays
  - City of El Cajon's Centennial Celebration
  - Excerpts from the 1883 Mrs. Owen's Cookbook
- 
- 

---

## July meeting to feature tour with box lunch

An encore is planned for the July Quarterly Meeting with a tour of the new El Cajon Police Station. At last January's meeting, ECHS members enjoyed El Cajon Detective Walt Miller's presentation so much that they wanted more. Hence, Detective Miller will guide the tour.

The July Quarterly Meeting will feature a Box Lunch starting at 11:30 a.m. Thursday, July 19, in the police station's Community Room. The new police station is located at 100 Civic Center Way, just off Magnolia Avenue, in El Cajon. Members are encouraged to wear good walking shoes for the tour.

Reservations are mandatory and must be received by Saturday, July 14. The meeting cost remains the same at \$15.

There will be no opportunity drawing at this month's meeting.

### Quarterly Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending \_\_\_\_ x \$15 Amt. Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Sandwich Choice (circle one) Turkey    Roast Beef

**Deadline July 14.** Mail reservation and checks to:

**ECHS**

**P.O. Box 1973**

**El Cajon, CA 92022-1973**

*Reservations not kept  
become a donation*