



EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HERITAGE

Volume 34, Issue 2

www.elcajonhistory.org

April 2013

Step back in time at historic home tour

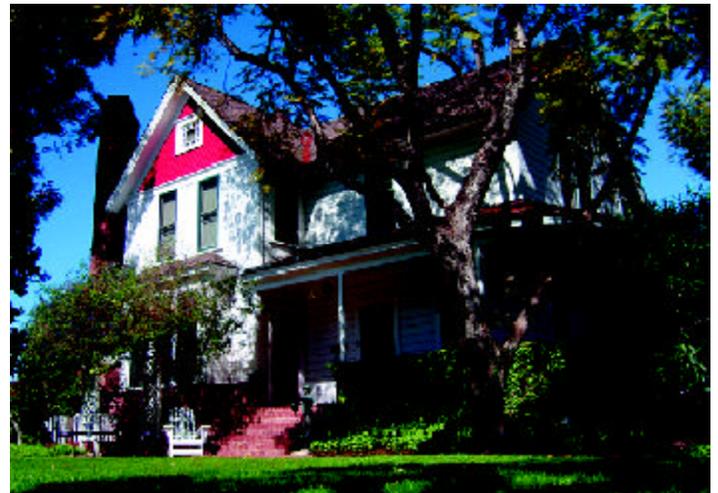
Capturing the flavor of the El Cajon Valley at the turn of the century, tours of the historic JPR Hall Ranch House will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 4.

Built in 1896, the house was the focal point of a 60-acre ranch and has fondly been called the "House of 12 Halls" for the parents and 10 children.

Located at 1591 Madison Ave., El Cajon, this historic home remains a reminder of the past amid the modern tract housing that now surrounds it. Wear flat shoes as there's steps, stairs, and uneven walkways.

Complete your journey back in time by sipping ice tea and lemonade in the garden while enjoying live entertainment.

Tours of the house cost \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door to benefit the El Cajon Historical Society. For advance reservation, mail checks to ECHS, P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022.



Privately owned by ECHS Vice President Jonna Waite and her husband Ken Waite, the historic JPR Hall Ranch House is rarely open to the public



It's Music Time



It's been a long time since we have had music at a Quarterly Meeting, and at this next meeting we are bringing music back in a grand way.

We are pleased that the Trinity Brothers have agreed to perform for us. Although their main interest in singing is gospel-oriented, their talent is diverse and extends to other types of music which they will demonstrate at our April 25th meeting.

The Trinity Brothers are a group of men that formed purely out of their love of music and singing, and it is evident as they perform. They can frequently be heard lifting their voices on Sundays at the Trinity Baptist



Trinity Brothers (from left) Richard Ashby, Charlie Laughery, and Bob Winterton Jr.

Church, 1150 Merritt Drive, often to a standing ovation gathering..

The quarterly meeting will begin at 11:30 a.m. Thursday, April 25, at the El Cajon Sizzler Restaurant, 1030 Fletcher Parkway (next to Smart & Final).

Come tap your feet and enjoy the wide range of musical numbers that will likely include some of your favorites.

Seating is limited for this musical treat so get those reservations in early. See the back cover of this newsletter for lunch information and the meeting reservation form. The deadline is Monday, April 20.

President's Message

Springtime abounds with activity

Dear Members and Friends of El Cajon Historical Society,

Greetings. The California Poppies are in bloom and that means “spring” to me. It’s time for our April 25th Quarterly Meeting. Our Vice Presidents Jonna Waite and Joe Klock have a nice lunch and program planned for you so be sure and make you reservations early. It will be at the Sizzler Restaurant again and we promise to have more than one public address system ready for back-up. I know how annoying it is not to be able to hear what’s happening.

We have some more dates coming up for your calendar. VP Jonna and husband Ken have generously offered their historic home for a “fund-raising tour” on Saturday, May 4th. Entertainment and refreshments will complement the tour of their beautiful home. Do plan to “visit” and spend some time with us.



The next important date is Monday, June 3, when we have the historic essay awards for the 3rd grade students from our local schools. We eagerly anticipate the community center once again filling with parents, teachers and students. The classes are currently touring the Knox House Museum in preparation for their essays.

The next Downtown Walk will be June 21 featuring a “Red, White & You” theme. The walk will be from 5 to 8 p.m. and the Knox House will be participating. Other dates for your calendar include “Hauntfest” on October 25 and “Wings in Snow” on December 6. Stop by and have your passport stamped at the Knox.

I want to share a part of my recent remembering the past adventure with my granddaughter when she took me to the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park at Coloma, a short drive from Sacramento. Being a docent for the Knox House, I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated how other docents share history. There is a two-stamp gold mill at the park and the docent explained in great detail the process of grinding the ore and how they captured the gold on the copper plate. He showed us a gold rock he had found in the tailings and we could see the streak of yellow gold surrounded by white quartz looking similar to gold found in our area.

When we were through with the mill tour he suggested (firmly) that we visit the little wood frame building next door as his wife was docent there and hadn’t had any visitors that day. The docent was sewing aprons on a portable Singer Sewing Machine from about 1901. She told us the machines were changed to a portable with a handle to turn the wheel so it could be transported easily across country. She also had a little gold nugget she shared with us the same as her husband did.

We continued on next door to the Blacksmith Shop where they had the fire going in the forge and were hammering on the red hot metal. The smells and sounds were all good.

We continued our day’s tour to the State Capital in Sacramento. I had never been there before and was surprised to find it in a setting more like a small town. Very little traffic and few people. We took the one hour tour of the Capital Building and then visited the Capital Park right next to the Capital Building. We toured the Memorial Grove and the White and Pink Camellia Trees were in full bloom. They were as big as our full grown orange trees. Also a huge magnolia tree was in full bloom. The State of California Women’s Club (GFWC/CFWC) currently has a project to place new tree markers on the trees in the State Garden. There are 1500 trees that were collected from all over the world.

Fran

Local third-graders compete in 32nd Annual Essay Contest

Plans are underway for El Cajon Historical Society's 32nd Annual Third Grade Essay Contest. Third-graders from throughout El Cajon are busy researching and writing their essays covering various aspects of El Cajon's history in the hopes of taking home a coveted trophy.

Everyone is invited to attend the awards ceremony to be held at 7 p.m. Monday, June 3, at the Ronald Reagan Community Center, 195 East Douglas Ave., in downtown El Cajon. Historical characters from El Cajon's past will be in attendance.

ECCHS would like to thank the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians for underwriting the program for the fifth year.

Also, thank you to the Cajon Valley Union School District for 31 years of partnership.

Special awards will be given at the awards ceremony in addition to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Place:

- The Fred and Nettie Kersten Award was established by their daughter Chloris Scott.

- The Virginia Stead Award bears the name of the first person to chronicle and publish information about plants in the San Diego area.

- The Rexford L. Hall Award is in memory of Rex Hall who dedicated himself to the education of children.

- The Alice J. Rodriguez Heritage Award was established to honor her dedication to children and their multi-cultural heritages.

- The Olaf Wieghorst Award is provided by Wieghorst Museum and honors this internationally-recognized painter of the West who lived in El Cajon.

- And the Judges Award is given in recognition of the Kumeyaay, El Cajon Valley's first inhabitants



Historical characters from El Cajon's past greet arrivals at last year's Third Grade Essay Contest awards ceremony.

ECCHS continually adds new items to website

Items are continually being added to the El Cajon Historical Society's website at www.elcajonhistory.org.

Visit the History page to read personal stories and narratives about El Cajon's past. These include some of the memorable articles by G. Carroll Rice about the Corona Hotel and the Model T. You may also submit your own personal remembrances to the historical society.

You'll also find Hazel Sperry's history of the Knox Hotel which was recently added to the History page.

The website also lists scheduled events at the Knox Museum and outlines resources that are available by visiting the Knox.

Past issues of the Heritage dating back to January 2001 are available on the Resources page. Current issues of the Heritage are usually posted on the web before they are delivered via the postal service.

If you can't wait until next issue for Milman Youngjohn's personal stories about growing up in an orange grove environment in the El Cajon Valley in the 1930's, you will find it already posted on ECCHS's website on the History page.

The website also offers a virtual tour of the Knox House Museum in addition to photos giving a brief glimpse at how much El Cajon has grown in the past century.

Museum needs docents for school tours

by **Becky Taylor**

Docents are needed to help with the growing number of visitors to the Knox House.

More than 500 students, teachers, and parents from six schools will have toured the Knox House Museum this year by mid-April. Many of them said that they have passed the museum many times and never realized how much local history it represents. Several parents have expressed their desire to return and tour the museum with their entire family.

During every school tour, “new” questions are asked so the docents are constantly learning. On a recent tour, a student asked me how the Campbell’s soup can would have been opened, and I said I didn’t know. As we were leaving the kitchen, one of the parents told me that the first can

opener was patented in 1858! (Ah, the joys of “smart phones”.)

Being a school tour docent doesn’t involve extensive knowledge about El Cajon history, just a willingness to “learn as you go” and a love of watching the excited faces of children and adults as they “connect” with their city’s heritage.

You may even get a compliment. During one of the tours, a student

sidled up to Eldonna Lay, stroked her period skirt, and remarked, “You’re so beautiful!”

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a docent, please call (619) 444-3800 and leave a message for Becky Taylor or send an e-mail to cruzbecky@cox.net.

Knox House windows fixed

The windows at the Knox House, some of which are 137 years old, have recently been rehabilitated.. Old window film has also been removed and new film installed.

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution and assistance of the County of San Diego, the City of El Cajon, and Architectural Film Design. Without their generosity the completion of this project would not have been possible.

Adult Ed class to visit the Knox

A 2-day tour has been scheduled for an adult education class of seniors from San Diego Community College - a course called Rediscovering San Diego.

Forty to fifty people will visit us and the Wieghorst over two days: May 28 and May 30; beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Thank you to our docents

Recent school tours from Vista Grande, Rancho San Diego, Bostonia, Avocado and St. Kieran were made possible thanks to docents Becky Taylor, Carroll Rice, Fran Parsons Hill, Eldonna Lay, Jonna Waite, Alice Rodriquez, Carla Nowak, and Paula Kyser.

In the next issue...

The Summer issue of the Heritage will feature an article written by Milman Youngjohn about growing up in an orange grove environment in the El Cajon Valley in the 1930’s.



Red Hats tour Knox Museum



The Ladies of the Lake Red Hats toured the Knox House Museum on February 20. In the above photo, ECHS Vice President Jonna Waite, center, explains items that were commonly found in kitchens 100 years ago.

ECHS book collection grows thanks to recent donations

ECHS would like to give well-deserved thanks to Jean Immenschuh for her donation of children's books owned by her mother at the beginning of the 20th Century. They will be used in the school room exhibit in our upstairs museum room.

As revealed by the Union-Tribune, El Cajon's Drum McComber is a regionally loved Santa Claus during the holiday season. He's also someone who purchased some in-perfect-condition Copley books from a random sale. A big thank you to Drum and his wife Jane (daughter of former city councilwoman/county supervisor/historical society president Lucille Moore) for bringing them directly to us for inclusion in our new research bookcase.

And thank you to Horace Dodd for the complete set of Brand Books. (See *New at the Knox* below)

Those desiring to do research on El Cajon and surrounding areas will be grateful for our growing collection of books and articles on El Cajon City and San Diego County areas. ECHS also many early copies of the El Cajon Valley News and the later Daily Californian newspaper. Check our website on how to access them.

ECHS needs volunteers to read essays

Volunteers are needed to read essays on El Cajon written by third-graders and then select the top three essays in their group of about ten. The selected three essays from each group advance to the finals.

To volunteer, please contact Becky Taylor, Alice Rodriguez, or Jonna Waite at 619-444-3800.

New at the Knox

by Mike Kaszuba, Curator

COMPLETE 9-VOLUME SET OF BRAND BOOKS

PUBLISHED BY SAN DIEGO CORRAL OF THE WESTERNERS

Donated by Horace Dodd

The San Diego Corral is dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the history, art and lore of the American West. These books were published in very limited editions, with scholarly articles penned by local authors and illustrated by local artists. This fantastic donation is literally jam-packed with fascinating articles on the old West. Take this opportunity to visit the Knox Museum and read or research from our growing library of local history.



W.D. HALL NAMEPLATE

Donated by Michael Taylor

This 1" x 2½" nameplate was originally attached to a piece of equipment sold by W.D. Hall, El Cajon's largest distributor of lumber, hardware and ranch supplies for over six decades. Supplying the valley since 1897, W.D. Hall sold lumber, block, sand, motors, paint, glass, plumbing and appliances ... you name it. During the early growth of El Cajon, nary a farm, ranch, household or school existed that wasn't furnished by and through the W.D. Hall Company.



Knox Museum shows what settlers ate

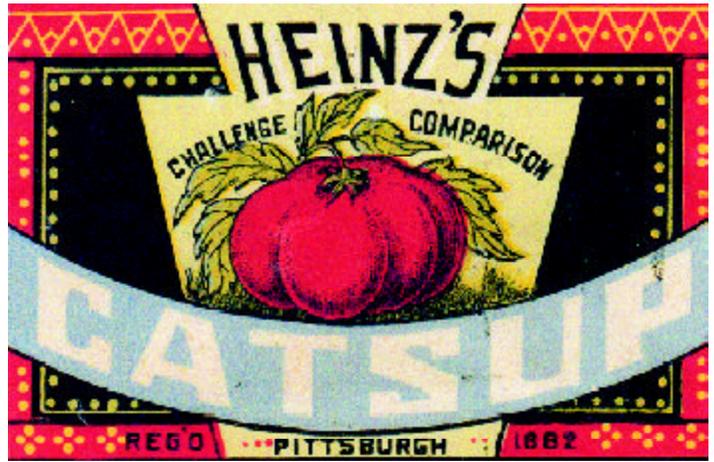
by Eldonna Lay

Food Exhibits are the BIG THING at the Smithsonian, Brooklyn Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and other leading museums

The New York Times recently ran a series of articles about leading museums adding examples of foods into their kitchen and dining room exhibits – all to make those two rooms more “palatable” for visitors. The same thing is going on at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and its “Supper with Shakespeare” as well as for “Playing House” at the Brooklyn Museum in their American period rooms.

Seen and written about in the Times “Arts & Culture” sections in Sunday papers, the idea is being picked up by house museums the country over. At the Knox, however, food examples have been used for some time including muffins and pie in the warming ovens, a “baked” chicken in the oven, and bacon and eggs “frying” on the stove. Upon visiting the Knox, children often say they’re “getting hungry”, especially upon seeing the Hershey bar, animal cracker box, Oreo cookie tin, and the cornflake box in and atop the kitchen cabinet. There is a marshmallow tin, too, and a bowl that holds the remnants of a soft-boiled egg – a yolk-spotted egg shell and a yellow-smeard spoon.

Now an extended exhibit on the dining room table shows visitors what our settlers ate for regular meals. Based upon what was locally available from farms and ranches, cookbooks and lovely tableware Boston-bred and other cultured ladies from “back east” brought with



them to Southern California and our valley, our table food replicas illustrate what was enjoyed by families and friends despite living on the frontier. A pretty honey container and a bottle of Heinz ketchup are there, too – bringing a touch of nostalgia to counter the intrusion of modernity due to Heinz’ recent sale to someone with an equally well-known name: Warren Buffet.

Gillespie Field, Old Houses featured this month

El Cajon Historical Society Board Members Bonnie Fredensborg and Jonna Waite will conduct a photo tour of homes in El Cajon that are 100 or more years old on April 18 as part of the “Journey to our Historical Past” speaker series. Held the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month, presentations begin at 6:30 p.m. at the downtown El Cajon Library in the Community Room, 201 East Douglas Avenue, El Cajon. Admission is free.

Upcoming presentations include:

- April 4 Peter Drinkwater of Gillespie Field, “A Historical Look at Gillespie Field: “Ranches – Gooney Birds & Bonanzas”
- April 18 Bonnie Fredensborg and Jonna Waite, “This Old House”



An exhibit on the dining room table at the Knox House shows visitors what our settlers ate for regular meals.

Excerpts from

Courtesy of Helen Nelson



TO CURE WARTS

Get from a homeopathic pharmacy a small vial of causticum. Give half a dozen pellets three times a day for three weeks and the warts will disappear.

A Look at the Lively Arts in El Cajon

1892 – 1952

by G. Carroll Rice

MOVIE GLAMOUR BRIGHTENED THE HORIZON

The mechanics of the motion picture; film, cameras, projectors and the associated technical equipment were pretty much in their final stages of development in the 1890's. Early practitioners had begun filming such landmarks as the Hotel del Coronado in 1898, but the industry remained centered in the East, primarily in New York and New Jersey. Producers trying to avoid patent infringement suits and domination by the Edison and other interests moved West, and, impressed by mild and sunny weather, settled in Southern California. 'The Flying A' Studios, managed by Allen Dwan settled in La Mesa in 1910. Much has been written about those hectic days of fast filming, quick processing, and rapid distribution of films; for some of the best, I recommend reading the publications of the San Diego Historical Society. Additional information is available from the La Mesa Historical Society. Dwan, who later became known as one of the greatest Hollywood directors of all time, produced over 150 films, mostly Westerns, in the years 1911 and 1912.

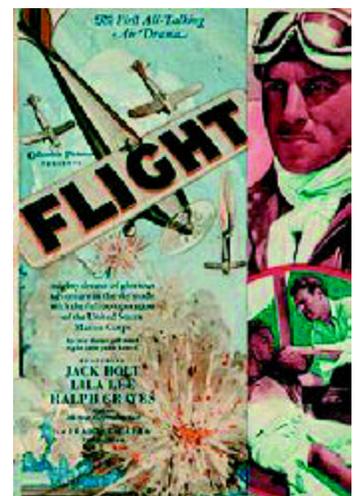
The El Cajon Valley, including Lakeside and Santee, offered venues ranging from the wide-open spaces of the rugged frontier to the sophistication and fashion of the Corona Hotel, offered a catalog of cinematic backgrounds for the action films of the day. Most of the Flying A films were only 10 to 12 minutes long (one reel), but packed high adventure into every minute. Many of Dwan's early films explored the story-lines, themes and techniques that made his work famous. In *Bonita of El Cajon* (1911), the daughter of a rustler falls in love with the sheriff. Furious, the father shoots his daughter and suffers for his misdeeds. In *The Poisoned Flume*, the story line involves a villainous rancher attempting to acquire the herd of a prosperous widow by marrying her daughter. Rebuffed and ordered off the range by a handsome new foreman, the rascal attempts to poison the herd by poisoning the water supply. With plenty of gunplay and heroics, the villain ends up in his own poison and you-know-who gets the girl. And all within a reel or so, a matter of minutes!

Essanay Studios were here, featuring the best-known cowboy stars of the time, including Gilbert 'Broncho Billy' Anderson, Tom Mix, George 'Pete' Morrison and his wife, Lillian Knapp. Dozens of local people were hired as extras in these films and as one man told me years later, "One day we'd be cowboys, and the next day we'd be

the Indians." Dr. Charles Knox told the story that one of the more popular cowboy stars, unknown to his fans, was deathly afraid of horses. He was so well liked and otherwise admired that no one ever told how in one close-up scene he had to mount his horse without a double. The horse spooked and ran away with him. It was the next afternoon before real cowboys from Lakeside were able to locate him in Fletcher Hills and take him off the animal. Still, many years later, although the incident was remembered, no one would name the unfortunate actor.

Columbia Pictures was shooting in a barn near the Grossmont summit, and other companies, less well known, had studios scattered around the region. The unfortunate locally-financed S-L Film Company failed and was taken over by Col. Ed Fletcher who with former stockholders renamed it Grossmont Studios. Films were produced at Grossmont from 1925 until 1929, when the faltering economy forced closure. The Grossmont studio building, where Anthony's Fish Grotto is today, was later used as a roller skating rink and burned down in the early 1930's. [I was just a little tyke when my parents drove up to see the burned-out shell, and pointed out a car which had been burned by falling power wires.]

Big history was made in El Cajon and La Mesa with the production of *Flight*, an aviation/adventure film with sound. The theme of aviation was exciting enough in 1929, but the development of sound systems brought a new dimension to motion pictures. *Flight*, directed by Frank Capra and distributed by Columbia Pictures starred Jack Holt, Lila Lee and Ralph Graves. The production headquarters was at the Arthur Embleton property on Chase Avenue (the Embleton's house had indoor plumbing.), and the film was dedicated to the United States Marine Corps, which provided airplanes and technical support. *Flight* had currency in its story line about the



Portions of the 1920 movie *Flight* were shot in El Cajon.

(continued on page 8)

Lively Arts *(continued from page 7)*

Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (1926 – 1928), and was an immediate technical, artistic, and financial success.

WE WENT TO THE MOVIES IN EL CAJON AND LOVED'EM.

Even in 1914, the people of El Cajon were no strangers to the movies. The Harris Store ('near the Hotel' is about all we know about it) celebrated its opening by showing five reels of motion pictures (a reel lasted between 10 and 12 minutes). They charged 10 cents to see the films – not named – and 50 cents to attend a dance afterwards. As an ugly sidebar, they specified "Americans only; no Mexicans" at the dance; perhaps that is why they are no longer remembered.

Details are fuzzy, but a paper by Hazel Sperry states that at some time in this period, motion pictures were shown in a corrugated iron building on North Magnolia, in the vicinity of today's Crystal Ballroom.

Eugene Vacher once recalled his first viewing of the movies at the Presbyterian Church, about 1920. They had put up sheets for a screen and his Uncle Alpheus had hand cranked the sprocket-drive mechanism. The film, itself, was a post World War I Erich Von Stroheim epic filled with battle action and civilian excesses. The violence of war offended no one, but certain ladies found scenes of smoking and drinking utterly offensive. Henceforth, it was decided, there would be no more movies at the church.

In spite of any objections, the movies were here to stay. An advertisement in the El Cajon Valley News for June 2, 1920, announced the regular presentation of "first class" motion pictures two nights a week at the El Cajon Hotel Annex. The movies were offered by a Mr. Harris Anderson, from Imperial Valley, operating as the 'Moon Theatres.' Showings were Wednesday and Saturday in El Cajon; Monday and Friday at the La Mesa Opera House; and Tuesday and Thursday at the Lakeside Hall. The first showing was scheduled for July 6th featuring Norma Talmadge in *Forbidden City*; and the following offering would be Charlie Chaplin in *The Fireman*. Tickets? Adults, 20¢, Children, 10¢

The 1922 arrival of Andrew Molins, his wife Mary and daughter Rose, marked the beginning of a new era of entertainment in El Cajon. Mr. Molins was a man with the enthusiasm, drive and business acumen to bring his dream of a movie theatre in El Cajon to reality. In January 1924, he bought the old Stell-Burgess store which had been moved about 150 feet east when the Lyon Building was built at the northeast corner of Main and Magnolia. He immediately set about renovating the building and purchasing the necessary seating, projection equipment, and piano for the 250-seat theatre. Shrewdly, he kept his costs down

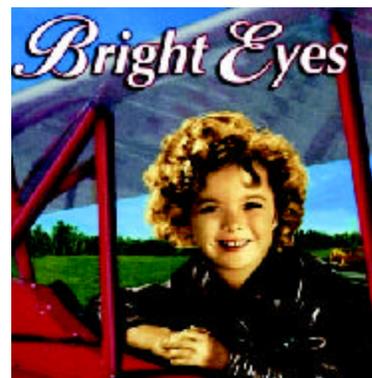
by making an arrangement to rent films from a theatre in La Mesa and returning them immediately after showing. Opening in March, just about the time his second daughter Josephine was born, the adventure soon proved to be so popular that by May, the program had to be expanded to include matinees as well as evening showings.

As time went on, it became obvious that a larger, more modern theatre would be necessary to meet the demands of his growing audiences. In 1926, he bought the land at the northwest corner of Magnolia and Douglas Streets and drew up plans for a new building. From the brilliant electric sign in front to the balcony seats, every facet of the new theatre was judged by the local newspaper as 'fireproof,' 'grand, ornamental, up-to-date, and impressive.' The grand opening took place on May 18, 1927, with all 551 seats filled by the entire membership of the Rotary Club and local dignitaries. Pharmacist Harry L. Hill was Master of Ceremonies and the community enthusiastically applauded Andrew Molins and the theatre builder Roy Fuller. The admission for children remained at 10¢ and increased to 25¢ for adults.

With the introduction of the 'talkies,' the nationwide weekly motion picture attendance grew from 57 million in 1927 to 90 million in 1930. However, as the Depression forced families to cut back on entertainment dollars, attendance declined to 50 million in 1933. Facing ruin, the motion picture industry and theatre managers like Mr. Molins had to invent new strategies to cut costs and still draw paying audiences.

The film producers responded with grand adventures (*King Kong*), musical shows (*Gold Diggers of 1933*), and zany comedies (*Animal Crackers*) that locked the hard times out of the theatre. Times were terrible in 1933, but Disney's *Three Little Pigs* sang "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf," defying the fierce Depression. The next year, Shirley Temple broke hearts in *Stand Up and Cheer* in April, then danced and warbled "Good Ship Lollypop" in *Bright Eyes* in December 1934. For the next ten years great films competed fiercely for the audience dollar, and in return delivered escape from harsh reality.

The popularity of the movie stars was further enhanced by professional publicists and a host of publications, peaking in the 1930's. In El Cajon, if not the whole world, the dimes and quarters that didn't go to the movie theatre went for fan magazines that glorified the silver screen. I remember how my high-school-aged girl cousins



Shirley Temple starred in the 1934 movie "Bright Eyes".

and their giggling friends lapped up every gossipy morsel they could smell out about the stars; every snippet was mulled over, discussed, and embellished like a revelation from holy writ. Lana Turner, Mae West, Gloria Swanson, Carole Lombard, Clark Gable, Jean Harlow and flights of other luminaries kept their admirers on mental tiptoe, breathless and wide-eyed. Studio publicity departments, free-lance writers, and publishers worked overtime to feed the demand for the latest, most outrageous, flattering, and always ROMANTIC adventure from the world of celluloid. I hasten to say, of course, that Shirley Temple was always reported so charming, wise, pure and wholesome it must have been hard to have lived up to the ideals and still smile . . . but, according to all reports, she did.

Competition on the technical side of the film industry fostered innovations such as 3-D, vastly improved sound systems, at least two color processes and new animation techniques, all of which added to the ‘gee whiz’ aspects of the medium. In the main, it appears that the creative response by the film makers countered the depression-created difficulties and powered the ‘golden age of Hollywood.’

At the El Cajon Theatre, not only did patrons forget their troubles for a couple of hours, but door prizes such as mattresses, fresh fish, groceries, furniture, and boxes of dishes added to the lure of Wednesday nights. The younger patrons rejoiced in Saturday matinees not only fraught with the breathtaking serial adventures of Gene Autrey and his Melody Ranch, Buster Crabbe as Flash Gordon, but they received coupons for ice milk bars at Harry Hill’s drug store after the show. Until sound systems were perfected and installed, Dorothy Smith played the player organ and changed pre-recorded rolls to keep up with the action on the screen.

In passing it should also be noted that Andrew Molins, like other business men of the community was active in civic affairs. For example, in 1926 he was appointed City Marshall, El Cajon’s law enforcement officer. The post was not only an honor, but Molins was expected to actively enforce City ordinances. When he resigned in 1927, he was appointed to the position of Deputy Marshall. In addition to his civic duties, he was an active Rotarian and Grand Master of the El Cajon Masonic Lodge. At his death in 1939, the El Cajon Theatre was sold to Burton Jones and then passed on to Gerald Gallagher in November 1941.

Wartime restrictions forced the postponement of critical repairs and a remodeling, but the theatre continued to operate at full capacity as thousands of new residents poured into El Cajon. The new management offered special rates to service personnel and gave tickets to reward Boy Scouts and other groups gathering aluminum, steel, rubber and paper in various ‘drives’ to recycle essential defense materials. In April 1945, the building, which had been believed to be ‘fireproof,’ caught fire and burned to the ground.

Rebuilding the theatre during the war was unthinkable since lumber and all building materials were being allocated to the war effort. However, the resourceful management replaced the screen, brought in new projection equipment and converted the ruin into an outdoor theatre. Seats were replaced by benches and on chilly evenings the patrons bundled up and grumbled, but still they came to the movies. I remember watching the news reels of the Normandy invasion there under whatever stars might have been shining through.

April 2, 1946, saw the opening of a new El Cajon Theatre on West Main Street. First-class in every aspect, it featured beautiful décor, state-of-the-art sound equipment, and excellent acoustics. Making life even more comfortable for everyone, there was a ‘crying room’ so that mothers with fussy babies could watch without disturbing their neighbors and a ‘smoking room’ for those who needed a puff during the performance. Owned and operated by the Gallaghers, the theatre was built by pharmacist Chet Hardin in memory of his son James who was killed in action during World War II.

Time has a way of changing economics and the advent of television brought dwindling audiences. The theatre was sold to the Pussycat Entertainment interests who used it to display X-rated films. As the novelty of sexy movies wore off, the theatre was sold once more. Totally renovated, it was operated briefly as the El Cajon Family Theatre, but television, home air conditioning, and changing tastes in entertainment spelled the doom of this beautiful theatre. It never recovered its early prestige and, in spite of local protest and sentiments, it was torn down in July 1992.

El Cajon theatres, like those elsewhere, have morphed into multiplex units and have become integral elements of the great shopping malls; but we still maintain our love for the movies and fondly remember the pioneers who made them possible.

From Tap to Ballet, from Country Music to Grand Opera, Black & White Silent to Talkies in Color, and Variety to Shakespeare in only 60 Years! Oh, what fascinating trip it was!

The people who chose the El Cajon Valley as home in the 19th and 20th Centuries were generally prosperous businessmen, laborers, and farmers who brought the culture of their former homes with them. They, and those who followed, joyfully created entertainment for themselves when it was unavailable from outside the community. As the population grew and transportation improved, better facilities became available and the opportunities for both expression and patronage expanded. Every step thereafter has promoted participation, support and appreciation of the lively arts. It’s the way it was . . . and probably always will be.

.....
•
• *A Look at the Lively Arts, in its entirety,* •
• *is available at www.elcajonhistory.org.* •
.....



Those Terrific Model T Fords

by G. Carroll Rice

Almost every American over the age of 70 can tell some tale involving a Model T Ford. Truly ‘people’s cars,’ far in advance of the German concept of ‘Volkswagon,’ they were called Tin Lizzies, Tee Bones, Flivvers, and, sometimes, just Tees. They were the butts of jokes and the objects of kicks and curses, but over fifteen million of them were produced between 1908 and 1927 and most served their owners well. With a variety of body styles and a cast iron 20-horsepower engine that could burn gasoline, kerosene or alcohol, they were adaptable to a rural, agriculturally-based America without paved roads, and they could be maintained with the bag of simple tools that came with the car.

Who could forget the unique huff-puff sound of that low-compression engine and the buzz of the spark coils? There were just three pedals and lever on the floorboards that changed gears and applied the brakes, and you can look in vain for an accelerator pedal. The throttle was a lever on the steering column, under the steering wheel on the left side. On the opposite side a lever controlled spark advance and retard. (Heaven help you if you tried to crank the engine with the spark advanced; the kick could break an arm.) Yes, the controls were pretty simple, but those Model T cars and TT trucks were the low-cost, low-maintenance core of American transportation for a whole generation.

Built high above the ground, the Model T could be driven over rocks and stumps, across streams, and over ruts that would cripple most modern cars in minutes. Once at a work location, they could be lifted up on jacks and their rear wheels fitted to drive belts that powered saw mills and farm machinery. Not only that, there were direct power take-offs available that attached to the differential.

Within a few years of the Model T’s introduction, kits were sold by the Sears, Roebuck company and other retailers to spiff up its basic chassis with a sporty ‘roadster’ body, or even change it into a tractor. In any setting or modification, it was rugged, reliable, and affordable; providing a vital contribution to the needs of the growing population of middle-class Americans. By the mid-1920’s, a little over \$250 would buy a new Model T that could travel up to 45 miles-per-hour while getting between 13 and 21 miles-per-gallon of low-cost gasoline.

Photographs of El Cajon dating between 1920 and 1930 show the predominance of Model T Fords on the streets, and one of them might have belonged to the Rices. In 1927, my newly-married parents drove their shiny new Model T coupe from San Francisco to El Cajon where my

grandparents had bought property near the corner of Third and Lexington. This is the first car that I remember, and like most early childhood memories, I recall it only in the context of certain scenes. For example, there is a distinctive rock formation near Descanso that I can’t pass without a smile and reminiscing about my first encounter with snow. I remember shivering in the cold and warming my little hands on a heater that was strapped to the left front side of that car. Most peculiarly, my mother called my attention to a pile of snowballs someone had left behind, and for years thereafter, I thought that snow fell in balls, just like in the comic strips in the Union and Tribune newspapers.

When I was very small, my father sometimes had to work late, and my mother would sit by the living room window, rocking me and anxiously watching for those faint yellow Model T lights coming up the long driveway from Lexington Street to the house. My mother was a city girl, and being alone at night in the middle of a dark orange grove with no telephone was a source of terror for her. She later admitted keeping me up late so she would have some company while she waited.

Another flash memory dates to no later than 1932 when my father sold our work mare, Jill, to a man who lived on Mollison Avenue and agreed to deliver her. As my mother drove slowly down Washington Street, I stood on the seat next to her and watched out the back window, while my father followed on horseback. My mother never did have a license, but in those more relaxed days a lot of people had no official paper and a ‘chauffeur’s license’ for truck drivers was a metal badge that was worn on the hat.

Some Terrific Model T Fords



2 PASSENGER OPEN RUNABOUT



**5 PASSENGER
TOURING CAR**



**3 PASSENGER
ROADSTER**

Recalling Our Past

Here's what was happening in El Cajon 100 years ago, in April 1913.

■ Knox Hotel arrivals included: from San Diego, Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Hastings, Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Huston, H. H. Hilles, D. M. Brewer, and Sherwood Wheaton; Mrs. F. A. Brown from Des Moines, Iowa; Arthur and Florence Swannell from Kankakee, Illinois; Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Lake from Ocean Beach; and Caroline H. Odell from Yonkers, New York.

■ C. C. Clark and family will, in a few days, move back to their home on the ranch east of town.

■ Mr. and Mrs. Morgan of Trenton, Tennessee, arrived in El Cajon and are guests of Mr. and Mrs. Wilkerson of the Knox Hotel.

■ The Meridan School baseball team played Lakeside and were beaten.

■ Prize Lemon Ranch sold for \$30,000. J. W. Dougherty sold his fine ranch near Bostonia to a Wisconsin man.

■ The annual meeting of the stockholders of the San Diego Inland newspaper company will be held at the office of the El Cajon Valley News on May 8, 1913, for the purpose of electing a board of directors for the ensuing year and transacting other important business. W.D. Hall is president and C.O. Smith is secretary.

■ Good Jersey milk cows are for sale for \$35 to \$75 each by J. P. Miller, who's home phone is 483.

■ Also for sale, grape vines cut for stove or heater for \$3.50 per cord by Thomas Ballantyne.

■ The W.D. Hall Company wants grain sacks.

El Cajon Historical Society Board of Directors

President	Fran Parsons Hill
Vice Presidents	Joe Klock, Jonna Waite
Treasurer	George Dall
Recording Secretary	Carla Nowak
Curators	Mike Kaszuba, Eldonna Lay
Archivist	Fran Hill
Office Manager	Mary Saxton
Maintenance	Rick Hall
Membership	Christy Klock
Essay Contest	Alice Rodriquez, Becky Taylor
Centennial Representative	Bonnie Fredensborg
Heritage Editor	Anita Tinsley
Members at Large	Ellen Anderson, Richard Lay, G. Carroll Rice, Karna Webster

Telephone Messages 619-444-3800



A Model T, far right, could be seen on El Cajon's Main Street in the early 1900s.

The real 'miracle machine' at our place was a Model TT 1916 truck that apparently came with the place when my grandparents bought it. It could sit for months, even years, in the barn or outside in the weather, unused, its tires almost flat, its under-the-seat gas tank all but empty. But when it was needed to haul a load of manure from Stacy's Dairy or bales of hay, my father would pump up the deflated tires, check it over for any problems (some caused by kids playing in it) and it would start on the first few cranks. The lack of doors and seatbelts would whiten the faces of today's safety advocates, but no one worried about it at the time. Even though I was fascinated by the buzz and blue sparks of the spark coils in a box on the firewall, my Daddy insisted that I sit on the bench seat beside him and not move when the truck was moving.

I've long since forgotten why we made trips to Lakeside and crossed the long wooden bridge across the San Diego River, but one memory persists. Yes, even today, when I cross that long modern concrete bridge on Highway 67, I hear the spark coil's buzz, the hollow puff of a Model T engine, and the rattle of bridge planks under the tires.

My friends and I often abused that old TT as we scrambled over it playing cops-and-robbers. Worse yet, I practiced my youthful mechanical skills by removing parts from its engine and body – parts that my father had to bolt back on before the truck could be driven. The end of our old Ford truck, like so many others, was a matter of transformation. My father traded the engine to a neighbor who needed it to drive a pump, and in exchange, the neighbor turned the bed and wheels into a trailer to haul sprinkler pipes. Today, you can still buy original Model T and TT parts from any number of automobile supply houses. Their forms persist as proof that most old flivvers never died; they just morphed into new hot rods, new machinery and automotive immortality.

Chug on in peace, old friends.

Return Service Requested

Thank You Renewed Members!

A big “thank you” to all of you who sent in your membership dues — and a kindly reminder for those who haven’t done so yet. Your membership expiration date appears on your address label, located to the right.

By sending in your dues before your renewal notice, you save ECHS costly mailing expenses, and thus enable ECHS to make better use of its resources.

Membership dues remain \$12 for Individual, \$20 Family, \$30 Organization, \$40 Business, and \$500 Enhanced Life.

Thank you for your support of ECHS.

April Quarterly Meeting offers rare musical treat

The El Cajon Historical Society’s April Quarterly Meeting will begin at 11:30 a.m. Thursday, April 25, at the El Cajon Sizzler Restaurant, 1030 Fletcher Parkway (next to Smart & Final). Lunch will be served at 12 noon followed by an outstanding musical program.

Three lunch entrees are available: steak, chicken, or shrimp. (*Vegetarian upon request.*) All meals include tossed green salad, an item from the dessert bar, and ice tea, coffee or soft drink. The cost for the meeting remains \$15.

Members will also have the opportunity to participate in, or contribute to, an opportunity drawing.

Reservations are mandatory and must be received by Monday, April 20.

Welcome New Members

- ◆ Marilyn R. Brucker
- ◆ Linda Hjelle
- ◆ Dorothy Miller
- ◆ Mike & Tamie Schirlls
- ◆ David & Robin Hart
- ◆ Taylor Family

April Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending _____ (\$15 each)

Amount Enclosed _____ *Reservations not kept become a donation*

Name _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Lunch Choice:
(if more than one person, indicate number of each)

Steak ____ Chicken ____ Shrimp ____ Vegetarian ____

DEADLINE MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2013

Mail reservations and checks to:
ECHS, P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973