

1973

Donations Furnish Restored Hotel

By VIRGINIA SPILLER

Colby Knudson, 7, and her brother, Sloan, 5, stood in El Cajon's historic Knox Hotel, fascinated by an old porridge bowl decorated with a faded picture of Baby Bunting.

The bowl was one of many items donated to furnish a child's room, a project of the El Cajon Woman's Club.

The hotel, now in Judson Park, is being restored by the City of El Cajon and the El Cajon Historical Society.

The building will be open to the public from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. the first Saturday of each month beginning today, says Mrs. Velma Carr, chairman of the historical society's furnishing committee and historical chairman for the woman's club.

Mrs. Harold Dixon and Mrs. C. J. Boyers papered the room in an old-fashioned pattern adorned with tiny sprigs of blue flowers. The woodwork has been painted white and the club provided braided rugs for the floor.

Club members have donated articles dating from the 1800s, including the porridge bowl, given by Mrs. Conrad Bley.

Major pieces of furniture in the room, a youth's bed and a high chair, are on permanent loan from Mrs. Metra Pitts Kurtz of El Cajon. They belonged to her father, the late Lee Pitts, born in 1892 and founder of the San Diego business, Pitts the Trunk Man, in 1919.

A quilt that hangs on the side of the bed was made by Mrs. Kurtz' father and his two brothers when they were children. "Grandmother insisted the boys learn to stitch," Mrs. Kurtz explains.

The Knox home was built in 1876, at the corner of what now is Magnolia and Main, and was the first permanent building in El Cajon. The city's first U.S. post office was housed in the building and it became the first business place in El Cajon when gold was discovered in Julian soon after the home was completed.

O trains, consisting of horse-drawn wagons, passed through El Cajon, and drivers stopped in the community to rest themselves and their horses.

Knox, a good businessman, added stables, hotel rooms and a bar to his business establishment.

The portion that has been preserved is only the original home, four downstairs and four upstairs rooms.

The only member of the immediate Knox family surviving is Alice Mabel Knox, known as "Miss Mabel Knox." She recently celebrated her 90th birthday.

Miss Knox has given many of the family heirlooms to the historical society for display in the house and many individuals and organizations have contributed, says Al Van Zanten, society president.

Historic documents and photographs, including portraits of the Knox family, are displayed.

Gifts from the 1800s still are being accepted, says Hazel Sperry, historian with the historical society.

Additional toys of that period will be appreciated, she says, "and we particularly need an authentic bookcase from the 1800s to display the Knox books. We also need a small table or stand for the Knox dictionary and Bible."

The house will be opened for special tours, and, "if public interest seems great enough," Mrs. Carr says, "it will be open to the public more often than one Saturday a month."

Judson Park, where the building is located, is on Magnolia Avenue between Park and Wisconsin avenues, across from the El Cajon Shopping Center.