

SCOTT, CHLOE

# A look back/ How streets were named

•Ever wonder what El Cajon was like in its infancy? How streets or areas came to be named? What kinds of people were important to the early growth of the community?

Anybody who has lived in the area for even a short time has probably been curious about these subjects.

A special monthly column in The Californian's Living Section will help answer those questions and instruct us a little bit about our history. The column is being presented by the El Cajon Historical Society and The Californian.

**By Chloris Scott**

*of the El Cajon Historical Society*

Wouldn't you think that a city with a Spanish name and heritage would have its oldest streets bearing names with a Spanish flavor?

Not so in El Cajon, whose name during the years has been translated from the Spanish as meaning "the box." It's only in the past few years, with new subdivisions being created around the original portion of the city that streets have been given Spanish names.

The first settlers in the San Diego area, outside of the native Indians, were the Spanish soldiers and priests who arrived by way of Mexico in 1769. About 15 years later the church was running sheep and cattle in El Cajon Valley, calling it Santa Monica. When Dona Maria Estudillo Pedorena obtained all the valley in 1845 from the Mexican government as a land grant it was known as El Cajon Rancho.

But Americans started arriving, the gold rush was on, and soon took over California. It was Isaac Lankershim who bought 48,000 plus acres of the Pedorena grant in 1869 with plans to subdivide it into wheat ranches. The Easterners who started settling in the valley were the ones who gave the area its street names.

Eastern and midwestern cities had their Main Street and so does El Cajon, for years the major thoroughfare through town. The major cross street has been Magnolia, named for the many non-native magnolia trees planted along the road leading to the 3,600 acres owned by George Cowles at the north end of the valley. His widow later married Milton Santee, whose name now describes the area of the valley's newest city.

Lankershim never got a street named for him, although it is the name on a tunnel carrying water and maintained by Helix Water District. There's no street named for Amaziah Knox, who built El Cajon's first commercial building in 1876. This was a seven-room hotel, now a museum maintained by the city and El Cajon Historical Society. It was built at what is now



Stan Honda photos/The Californian

**Magnolia Avenue was named after the many non-native magnolia trees planted along the road.**

Main and Magnolia, an area once known as Knox's Corners.

The Uri Hill family gave its name to more than one street. There's Renette, for Mrs. Hill; Claydelle for two of their children, Clayton and Della; Minnesota, the state from which they came; and the Hillsdale area, which Hill owned.

Chase Avenue is named for Major Levi Chase, the lawyer who was given 7,000 acres by Lankershim for getting him clear title to his Spanish land grant from the United States government.

The Bostonia area and street are named for the former 550-acre Boston ranch bought in 1886 by Souther and Crosby of Boston, Mass. Crosby Street and Sumner Street, named for Crosby's son, are part of this heritage.

Men who sold real estate also put their names on streets. W.H. Somers was editor of the El Cajon Valley News (now The Daily Californian) in 1892. His home was on the street called Somermont, off Pepper Drive. Graves, Van Houten and Mollison also sold off various tracts in El Cajon, putting their names to the streets.

Johnson Street is named after a brother and sister, Dr. C.M. Johnson and Miss Anna Johnson, both of whom had large amounts of acreage and homes along the southern foothills of the valley. In 1892, Dr. Johnson had one of the three telephones in all the valley and also was involved in a raisin packing house.

S.M. Marshall had a 200-acre ranch along the southern foothills. He was active in the El Cajon Vineyard Co., serving as secretary/treasurer. The company had a raisin de-stemming plant alongside the

