
Heritage

El Cajon Historical Society Quarterly News

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July

City Guard Band on Stage for July 15th Band Concert in Judson Park Gazebo

Pack a picnic lunch . . . dust off the lawn chairs . . . remember the sunscreen . . . it's time for our Annual Summer Band Concert!

Join us at 2:00 on Sunday afternoon, July 15th, in Judson Park to hear Gene Vacher, long-time conductor of the San Diego City Guard Band, lead the group in a patriotic medley of pieces chosen to celebrate Summer and the Fourth of July.

As always, the concert will be an opportunity to hear the band, to renew acquaintances, and to share an afternoon with new friends in the lovely little park across from the Knox House Museum at Magnolia and Park Avenues. We'll provide cookies and chilled water to go with your picnic lunches.

The Vachers are among El Cajon's original families and Gene, now in his early nineties, has been a cornerstone of the community's musical history. He got his first musical instrument as a third grader and has played and taught music for more than eighty years, locally and throughout the world. He played with the official band for the 1935

Exposition in Balboa Park, served in the Army as Assistant Chief of Bands for Europe, and was a member of the San Diego Symphony while still in college. Join us on the 15th for a delightful afternoon in the park!

Rose Society, City Create Lovely New Community Garden in Judson Park

Come, smell the roses! The Historical Society was happy to help introduce key people who could help implement a recent suggestion by members of the East County Rose Society that the group plant a public rose garden around the gazebo in Judson Park.

The organization offered to furnish and plant approximately 25 rose bushes, to perform monthly maintenance during the garden's first year, and to conduct a Winter pruning demonstration open to all rose lovers in the community.

We were delighted to put the Rose Society representatives in touch with Chris Presmyk, the City of El Cajon's Parks Director, and his staff who worked quickly to help facilitate creation of the first rose garden in any of our city parks. The bushes have all been planted and will be a beautiful backdrop for the July 15th band concert in the gazebo.

We extend our congratulations to Rose Society president Miriam Yoder and her members for their hard work and we look forward to continuing to discuss future opportunities to plant a second garden near the Knox House.

Our thanks to Miriam and the rose lovers!

Two Local Authors to Escort August 11th Bus Tour of Historic El Cajon Valley

Saturday, August 11th has been chosen as the date for the Historical Society's inaugural bus tour of historic locations in El Cajon and the valley. Jim Graves and Jim Walters, co-authors with Elizabeth Montgomery of the Society's "Bus and Auto Tour of Historical El Cajon" published in 1998, will narrate the tour, offering their entertaining and knowledgeable insights about the valley's growth and development.

We will gather in the City Hall parking lot off of Magnolia and Julian at 11:45 and depart on time at 12:15. A brief mid-tour stop will allow us to stretch our legs at Kennedy Park. The bus will return to Rea Street at approximately 2:30 where our president, Judy Garrett, will take us on a brief tour of the Olaf Wieghorst Museum and Western Heritage Center.

The bus will accommodate only 56 passengers for this \$15.00 per person tour, so early reservations are encouraged. A form for your use is included in this newsletter.

Any questions? Please call Jim Graves at 444-7564 or Bea Heyenga at 444-4366.

Paint Company Develops Palate of Historic Colors

The Valspar Corporation, working with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has recently developed a line of 140 documented historic paint colors in uniquely American hues including Woodrow Wilson Presidential White and Lyndhurst Duchess Blue.

The American Tradition line of paints was developed by Valspar after extensive research at National Trust historic sites and other locations across the country. A spokesman describes the original colors his company found

as vibrant and fresh, “not the dusty muted colors we see today.”

To help homeowners interested in using the paints for contemporary homes, the company has developed display cards showing photos of the paints on both historic and 20th century homes.

The new line of American Tradition paints is available exclusively at Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse stores. Lowe’s only San Diego area location is in Mission Valley, near the IKEA store on Friars Road, just west of Qualcomm Stadium.

Stop in soon to see the beautiful new colors now available to homeowners.

A Look Back

“The waltz is a dance of quite too loose a character, and unmarried ladies should refrain from it altogether, both in public and private; very young married ladies, however, may be allowed to waltz in private balls, if it is very seldom, and with persons of their acquaintance.”

The Gentleman and Lady’s Book of Politeness. Mme. Celnart, 1835

On the Reading List

Are the children ready for a tour of historical sites? Want to visit an historic garden? Think you’d like a vacation in an historic hotel?

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a terrific, affordable resource which can help with those and dozens of other topics. Among the publications currently available are:

◆ National Trust Guide to Historic Bed & Breakfasts, Inns, and Small Hotels (\$22.95)

◆ What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture (\$14.95)

◆ Gardens and Landscapes of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (\$11.95)

◆ Buyer’s Guide to Older and Historic Houses (\$12.00)

For an order form and list of publications, call the National Trust at (202) 588-6296 or visit the website at www.preservationbooks.org

Sprites Make Generous Gift to Society for Purchase of New Archival Records Program

Sprites of East County, the mother/daughter philanthropic organization which has worked with us for three years in our Junior Docent program, recently made a generous award to the Historical Society which will allow us to begin the long process of transferring our

records to a computerized file maintenance program.

The \$900 check, presented in May at the Sprites annual dinner, will be used to purchase a copy of the "Past Perfect" computer software designed specifically for museums by the American Association for State and Local History. Described as the world's leading museum software, the program will help us manage our collection, maintain membership records, assist people visiting the museum to conduct research, and perform a variety of other functions important to the preservation of our community's history.

Our archivist, several of our docents, and a number of our Sprites volunteers will assist with implementation of the "Past Perfect" system. We expect that a few of our Junior Docents will also assist us during coming months with transcription of oral histories which will be recorded by our members during coming months.

To prepare for our new software, the Society recently used funds from our savings account to purchase new a computer, a printer, and a scanner for the museum office. Our thanks to Richard Lay and Joe Klock for their expert advice and selection of the equipment to match our needs!

Recent Works of Art Now on Display at City Hall

"Paint our Town," an art day sponsored by the El Cajon Art Association in April, resulted in the creation of a variety of lovely paintings of our downtown area, the Knox House

Museum, historic local homes, and other scenes of El Cajon. The work was hung in the lobby of city hall in mid-June and will be on display for three months.

The East County Art Association, a non-profit organization which promotes fine art appreciation and art education for its members and for the community, also provides rotating exhibits of members' paintings throughout City Hall. Located in the public areas on each floor of the building, the work frequently includes watercolors, oils and acrylics, collages, and other framed pieces. Enjoy them during your next visit to the building!

The Art Association also welcomes visitors to its gallery at 1246 East Main Street. Summer hours at the gallery are 11:00 - 3:00 Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Historic Documents to Get New Exhibit Space at National Archives Building

The exhibit halls of the National Archives Building in downtown Washington, D.C. closed for renovation on July 5th and will reopen in September 2003. During that period of time, the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights will be unavailable for public viewing. When the exhibit halls reopen, those documents and others will be displayed in new cases, allowing better access to visitors with disabilities and allowing, for the first time, all four pages of the Constitution to be displayed.

When the Rotunda reopens, visitors will be welcomed to a new, state-of-the-art, public exhibition space in which documents from the buildings of the National Archives will be complemented by media presentations, the latest computer technology, and an exciting schedule of interactive workshops, lectures, and tours.

During the renovation, documents and other information will continue to be available on the National Archives website at www.nara.gov

Hundreds Participate in Student Essay Contest

Nearly 300 third grade students from 15 of the Cajon Valley Union School District's elementary schools participated in this year's Essay Contest. We salute them and their teachers for their participation and we encourage them to stay involved in the study of local history. Each of the students, their teachers, and their families has an opportunity to continue to enrich the life of their community.

Congratulations to all of the following students (and to their teachers, named in parenthesis) for their winning essays:

◆ First Place:

Nicole Bartlett – Cuyamaca (Clark)

◆ Second Place:

Christina Haddock – Vista Grande (Pear)

◆ Third Place:

Victoria Luna – Flying Hills (Lowe)

◆ Nettie Kersten Award:

Anthony Martínez – Rancho San Diego (Dunk/Hassenflow)

◆ Neatness:

Stephanie Larson – Crest (Fisher)

Cody Gautereaux – Vista Grande (Pear)

Kaitlin Smithson – Vista Grande (Baker)

Dina Tominna – Vista Grande (Harned)

Kristin White – Vista Grande (Baker)

◆ Originality:

Phillip Hyunh – Avocado (Lieberknecht)

Hillary Laughery – Crest (Harlos)

McKenzie Riley – Fuerte (Waite)

Matthew Celustka – Hall (Jones)

Jeffrey Jones – Hall (Jones)

Dani Shewbridge – Hall (Jones)

Darren Swanson – Madison (Levine)

William Coombs – Rancho S. Diego (Fitzsimmons)

◆ Research:

Skyler Dreher – Flying Hills (Gastauer)

Marissa Hernandez – Flying Hills (Avelar/
Muratet)

Ulynea Sherwin – Flying Hills (Lowe)

Steven Levenson – Vista Grande (Pear)

◆ Best of School:

Matt Shakowski – Avocado (Lieberknecht)

Samantha Probst – Ballaneyne (Haesacker)

Jordan Small – Blossom Valley (Nugent)

Cassandra Berkowitz – Chase (Caruso)

Zach Smith – Crest (Fisher)

Kiersten Super – Cuyamaca (Clark)

Rachel Alvord – Flying Hills (Gastauer)

John Csukran – Fuerte (Waite)

Michelle Cantrell – Hall (Bocker)

Katryna Jacobson – Madison (Levine)

David Jones – Magnolia (Ford)

Douglas Lewis – Meridian (Clayton)

Mike Potts – Rancho San Diego (Goe)

Heather Furr – Rios (Brooks)

Kathleen Stilson – Vista Grande (Pear)

◆ Honorable Mention:

Garrett Gilley – Crest (Harlos)

Kara Hallett – Crest (Harlos)

Malissa Proietti – Crest (Fisher)

Carissa McEwan – Blossom Valley (Nugent)

Anna Ayala – Flying Hills (Lowe)

Chelsee Harris – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Brandon Herwehe – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Laurissa Lane – Flying Hills (Lowe)

Carly Lindsay – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Alex Lopez – Flying Hills (Gastauer)

Zachary Maguire – Flying Hills

(Avelar/Muratet)

Dylan McNearney – Flying Hills (Anderson)

Amber Wettig – Flying Hills (Lindsay)

Carolyn Knapp – Meridian (Clayton)

Alexandra Martinez – Rancho S. D.

(Fitzsimmons)

Kelly Lindahl – Vista Grande (Baker)

John McCurry-Schmidt – V. Grande

(Kruepens)

Brandon Toma – Vista Grande (Harned)

Brenden Wright – Vista Grande (Harned)

◆ Heritage Award:

Samah Al-Nahi – Chase (Caruso)

“My Life Out West”

by Nicole Bartlett

First Place Winner, 2001 Essay Contest

“Hello my name is Nicole Bartlett and this is the story of my life out west in 1898. It all started when my pa saw an ad in a magazine that said The great El Cajon valley, Cheapest lands in California. When my pa saw that, he knew we should move. Before we left Colorado we had our family portrait taken. Then we set out for El Cajon.

“We came into the valley by stage coach. It was a long, bumpy and dusty ride. It was dark when we arrived. We didn’t have a place to stay so we went to the Knox hotel. For one dollar a day we could have a place to stay and receive the best of attention. Mr. and Mrs. Knox were so

generous, one time we didn't have enough money to pay for our meal but he gave it to us anyway. People said Mr. Knox was a generous man and always cared about the less fortunate.

"While my pa was working out the deal for our land Mr. and Mrs. Knox let us stay at the hotel for free in exchange for work. Ma was working in the kitchen cooking and baking for the customers. It was hot and hard work. Tyler my little brother would fill the wood boxes for the woodburning stove. I could smell the aroma of pies baking all the way to the stables. Tyler also swept the porch in front of the hotel. I was caring for the animals. The horses were my favorite, especially a black stallion named Blaze. Pa also helped Mr. Knox on his wheat farm.

"It was now time to be enrolled in school. I'm in 3rd grade. My teachers name was Miss Merrill. Most children walked but some rode horses. Mr. Knox was nice enough to let me and my brother ride Blaze to school. In the corner of the school yard was a small corral for the horses. Miss Merrill was excited because she found out her school was getting a 200 pound school bell.

"Pa found us our own place. We grew grape raisins and raised chickens. The Asher and Bostonia ranch grew raisins too. Their raisins won 1st place at the Chicago worlds fair in 1893. I think our raisins are just as good.

"One day Tyler and I almost were run over by horses. It was a popular sport to race up Main Street. Luckily Mr. J.H. Dodson saved us by threatening the racers a fine of three dollars for each violation. That ended the racing on Main Street.

"The first doctor was Eugene Mathewson in 1896. He came to my house by horse and carriage to take care of my sick brother. Dr. Mathewson fixed everything from carbuncles, broken bones to scalplings.

"The most exciting thing to happen in the valley was the minor gold rush of 1898. Gold was found in many spots on the Chase ranch. My brother and I rode Blaze to watch the prospectors mine for gold.

"I like my life our here in the valley. I'm glad we came. I think I'll want to stay forever."

The Inside Back Page

Mr. Knox's Neighborhood -- the Times They are a Changin'

by Judy Garrett, President

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone, General Custer died at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and the United States celebrated its centennial. Presidential election results were contested in Florida. It was a two day trip on horseback from San Diego to the gold mines in Julian, and Amaziah Knox became the El Cajon Valley's first downtown commercial developer.

The small hotel built at "Knox's Corners" became the heart of our Central Business District long before that phrase became popular among geographers and urban planners. Within a short period of time, a second hotel and other businesses were built close to Knox's building. When walking was a primary form of transportation and the installation of utility services was prohibitively expensive, the practicality of a compact business district in a compact community was well understood by residents and newcomers alike. Downtown was the center of activity for a pedestrian society and closely related by convenience to home and the workplace. Towns were often laid out with a commercial core surrounded by housing, ringed by factories and other job sites and, finally, farms and ranches on the periphery.

As cars became plentiful and affordable, and as the lure of suburban living attracted many city dwellers, traditional and aging communities lost out to the lure of the new and the different. People moved to the countryside and the jobs and business services were quick to follow. The regional mall, scoffed at when the first one was built near Detroit in the early 1950s, became the coveted goal of every community. Downtowns tried to compete by duplication, by bolting modern facades to historic storefronts, by adopting Disney's theme village concept, and by closing streets to try to force pedestrians out of their cars. When those copycat measures failed, desperate communities kidnaped the regional mall concept and overlaid it on their downtowns.

In this new century, our aging downtowns have an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent themselves to respond to the demands of a scattered and highly mobile population. Many of today's downtowns are no longer the geographic centers of communities. People have an unlimited variety of ways of receiving services and of communicating with each other, and we have more leisure time now than at any time in our history.

Savvy downtown property owners and tenants recognize the vast, exciting opportunities before them to create new residential and social connections, new specialty retail districts, new cultural and educational opportunities, and new community gathering places in their declining, neglected central business districts. El Cajon and the properties around Knox's Corners are on the brink of a bold new

future as a restaurant, residential, arts, leisure, retail, museum district, an urban village which can become a regional focal point.

Mr. Knox's neighborhood continues to grow, to change, and to improve. Would he be proud? Would he be involved? He'd be delighted to have the opportunity!

Board Recruiting Volunteers for Exciting New Programs

The Board of Directors is currently recruiting volunteers for a number of programs and projects and we invite your participation on a schedule convenient to you. We need a few more docents to help with museum tours on Thursday and Saturday afternoons --- training, support, and working partners will be provided. We are also looking for a few interviewers to help with our oral history project. And, we would like to have two or three computer users available to help us with our new record keeping software program.

Volunteers need not be members, although we'll be delighted to have you join the organization!

Knox House Museum hours:

12:30 - 3:30 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays

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.

President	Judy Garrett
Vice President	June Leck
Recording Secretary	Carla Nowak
Corresponding Secty.	Ellen Andersen
Treasurer	Christy Klock
Editor	Judy Garrett

If you are not now a member and would like to join, please stop by the museum for an application or leave a message for us at 444-3800 and we will be happy to send one to you.

El Cajon Historical Society
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-- details inside --