



Farmers during settler days harvested wheat using horse-drawn machinery around the turn of the 20th century in an area where Valhalla High School was built. *El Cajon Historical Society*

EAST COUNTY STORYTELLERS

History of our area comes to life again in weekly column

Take a trip through East County, not on its roads but into its past, with tour guides who know their terrain. They are local historians with stories to share and a knack for tracing the winding, wild roots of the things around us today. Each week offers a new tale from a different part of East County.

By Eldonna Lay

History is a collection of a period's records, legends, diaries, novels and publications. Each holds nuggets of information for a more in-depth understanding of historic figures, and what society was like in their day.

Jane Austen novels (and movies) reflect the manners, architecture, clothing and attitudes of 19th-century England. Our own Civil War began with the fiery speeches and writings of New England philosophers, authors and reporters.

Without knowing what people of an era thought, needed or wanted, we miss having a better sense of why and how they made world-changing decisions.

Why and when did leaders choose peace over war? Why invent gunpowder, or the jet

— a nation's direction. I'm always astounded when someone brands history as boring. Informed people know that history has all the drama and tragedy of grand opera, and sometimes the witless farce of Shakespearean comedy.

I've been assigned to tell you stories about the histories of the city of El Cajon, those with El Cajon addresses on Mount Helix, and the county's unincorporated areas in and near Rancho San Diego. But for those stories to make any sense, my next few entries begin with brief, general descriptions of what was going on in our hills and valleys between the 16th and mid-19th centuries. Then, when I introduce yesterday's local dramas and comedies, you'll enjoy them even more.

To do rewarding research of your own, I highly recommend checking out James Trager's