

SCOTT, CHLORIS

They lined streets before Ma Goose

Let's parade through Inland's history

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?

This column aims to help answer those questions. It is being presented by the El Cajon Historical Society and The Daily Californian. The photographs and artwork shown with each column are from the society's collection on display at the Knox Hotel on Magnolia and Park avenues in El Cajon.

The feature will appear monthly.

By Chloris Scott

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FOR THE PAST 37 years November has been known as Mother Goose month in El Cajon.

It wasn't always so.

There have probably been more parades in El Cajon in November than in any other month of the year because for many years following World War I, parades were held to mark the Nov. 11, 1918, Armistice and to honor all those servicemen, both dead and living, who had fought in that conflict.

But there have been parades and celebrations in others months: to call attention to the Orange Day celebrations, to observe Memorial Day, to encourage residents to contribute to the building of the James Hardin-Reid Chamberlain War Memorial Building following World War II.

Those who planned the Orange Day celebration on Feb. 22, 1915, anticipated a crowd but not the mob that came. According to the Feb. 27, 1915, edition of the El Cajon Valley News, 2,500 to 4,000 persons were in El Cajon that day.

According to the newspaper report, nearly every car owner and car in the valley were pressed into service to meet the trains and bring the visitors to Main Street. These same cars took many of the visitors on tours of the valley to see the many citrus groves loaded with fruit and the flowers in bloom.

The parade, if it could be called such, was no more than watching the busy cars and the visitors strolling up and down Main Street.

Local ranchers, blessed with perfect growing conditions, displayed the pick of their crops in a fruit display. Specimens of grapefruit from the Seidel Ranch

measured over 20 inches in circumference and weighed over 3 pounds each; the lemon crop was the best it had been for a long time; both Valencia and navel oranges were featured, and the tangerines were so large that they almost passed as oranges.

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Citrus fruit wasn't the only valley product on display. Proud growers showed samples of raisins, and one exhibit consisted of branches from an Elberta peach tree, 10 feet in length and 1 inch in diameter, grown in one year.

The El Granito Springs company showed its line of bottled water; pens on the north side of the street contained Tamworth and Duroc Jersey hogs, and poultry clucked in front of one store.

The Woman's Assembly cleared \$95 on the food it sold from a booth east of the post office.

The best of the exhibits were sent to the San Diego Chamber of Commerce showroom as a continuing advertisement for the El Cajon valley.

This was the first of several annual

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Orange Day celebrations — but none was so great as the first.

Armistice had been declared on Nov. 11, 1918, but it wasn't until July 25, 1919, that the community had a welcome-home party for the 105 Inland men who had been discharged from the military. Thirty-eight were still in the service; three others had died.

The parade formed on Main Street, close to Magnolia, at 2:45 p.m. The servicemen, in uniform, marched to the grounds of the library building in Triangle Park, accompanied by music furnished by the Naval Air Station band. There were prayers and speeches, music by the 22-

piece regimental band from the 32nd Infantry at Camp Kearney, and the demobilization of the service flag that hung across Main Street since August.

Stars representing each of the servicemen, three of them gold for those who had died, were on the service flag that was demobilized.

Following the ceremonies, a chicken dinner was served to the servicemen with the single young women of the area serving as waitresses.

Parades during the 1920s and 1930s helped to keep the Armistice Day

OVER

flags are carried proudly in the 1946 parade that sought funds for the construction of a war memorial building.



observance alive but they also offered other attractions to local residents. Some years the local legionnaires and servicemen joined their La Mesa and San Diego counterparts in ceremonies.

In 1920, the Nov. 11 observance included a ball game between the El Cajon team, composed almost entirely of ex-servicemen, and the San Diego all-stars; the dedication of the new legion hall, formerly the old El Cajon Valley News building on Magnolia, south of the Cuyamaca Bank; a dance at night and a midnight supper.

La Mesa legionnaires joined El Cajon for the Armistice Day parade in 1924, marching from the library to the legion hall for a flag-raising ceremony and address by Rev. Charles Richardson of the Presbyterian Church.

The lament then, as now, was that so few American flags and bunting were flown on Armistice Day.

In 1928 Armistice Day came on a Sunday with El Cajon and La Mesa joining together in services at the La Mesa Grammar School. Churches even canceled Sunday school classes to allow the children to march in the parade.

The next year, and for several years following, new activities changed the character of the Armistice Day event in El Cajon. Billed as the biggest celebration ever held in El Cajon, it was dubbed the El Cajon Valley Autumn Festival.

The event in 1929 also celebrated the installation of gas mains and the municipal sewer system. Main Street was closed for a carnival, a platform was erected for athletic events and a band concert. A mile-long parade, headed by the Holzwasser Band from San Diego, started at the grammar school and headed west on Main.

These autumn festivals continued, new events being added to draw the crowds for the parade and the entertainment that followed. Funds raised were earmarked to "acquire for the city for recreational and playground purposes the vacant block lying between Magnolia and Prescott and Douglas and Lexington avenues," according to an El Cajon Valley News release of Sept. 23, 1932.

Little attention was given to parades during the World War II years, although servicemen could be seen regularly in downtown El Cajon.

Parades resumed after the war, some held on Nov. 11, others on Memorial Day in May.

A parade in 1946 had a double purpose, to honor local servicemen and to encourage donations for the construction of a war memorial building on an 8-acre tract on Chambers Street purchased in June of that year by American Legion Post 303.

A corporation was formed, the James C. Hardin-Reid C. Chamberlain Civic Memorial Assn., with representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Fleet Reserve Assn. serving as directors. One building, among several that were originally designed for the Chambers Street property, was finally constructed and serves as headquarters for local VFW, Fleet Reserve and Am-Vets.

But the parade that has drawn the most people through the years to El Cajon is the Mother Goose Parade, which began as a small night-time endeavor in 1947 in which local businesses and organizations entered floats, bands, marching units and equestrians. Now, people from throughout the county come early with cars and vans, blankets and chairs, to get a front seat.

