



## La Mesa Historical Society

# LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 40, Issue 4

Fall 2015

## President's Address

By Jim Newland  
President, La Mesa Historical Society

**H**ope you are keeping cool through our hot and humid summer of 2015. The Society and its volunteers continue to keep things moving coolly forward. As our part of drought sacrifice, we have allowed the McKinney House grass to go brown (do not fear, with rewatering it will rejuvenate). Meanwhile, we are working on upgrading our landscaping system to make our water use more efficient.

### 2015 Historic Home Tour

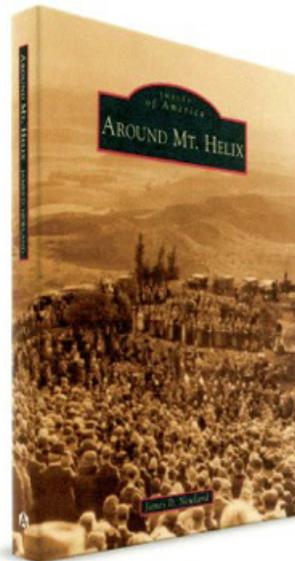
Two major events are confirmed for this fall. We hope you have marked your calendars for our big fundraiser community-based event—the annual La Mesa Historic Home Tour on Saturday, November 7.

This year, we will tour five great and historic homes in the Grable and Park Additions located on Mt. Nebo and in the Village areas. These houses once again reflect the historic character of our city and our residents' dedication to continue that heritage. The houses represent homes from the origins of the city in the 1910s and 1920s.

You can obtain tour tickets by visiting the society on Saturdays, sending in the flyers that will be mailed to you (prior to this newsletter), or by going to the Events page on our website (<http://lamesahistory.com/calendar>). Make sure to get your tickets early for the members' discount and to confirm a place in what should be a grand 10th Annual event.

### Around Mt. Helix Book Release

Two weeks prior, on October 24 at the Mt. Helix Nature Theatre, we are partnering with the Mt. Helix Park Foundation and Grossmont-Mt. Helix Improvement Association for the book release party of



*Around Mt. Helix.* This new book is a history of the Mt. Helix, Grossmont, Spring Valley, Casa de Oro, Calavo Gardens, and Rancho San Diego areas. It was a privilege for the Mt. Helix Park Foundation to ask me to write this book and it is a companion to the *La Mesa* book that was released 5 years ago. We hope you will be able to join us.

You can RSVP to this members-only event from the Evite that was sent to all with email addresses (<http://tinyurl.com/opykga9>), or you can call and leave a message at 619-466-0197.

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### Mt. Helix Nature Theatre, circa 1928

*Mt. Helix has been a natural and cultural icon for centuries. The White and Yawkey families funded the Richard Requa-designed nature theatre, which opened in 1925 and solidified the peak's status as a community-based cultural resource for the surrounding region.*

# Landmarked Homes of La Mesa

## The Martin Christopher House (1938)

The Martin Christopher House, located at 8505 Lemon Avenue, is a residence of significant historical importance to La Mesa and San Diego County. Its distinctive style and design, as well as the high quality of construction, materials, and craftsmanship, make it a well-defined example of Mission Revival architecture. The house makes a unique statement with its asymmetry, flowing rhythms, and architectural massing.

Built at a cost of approximately \$10,000, the 3,018-square-foot home is sited on a .53-acre irregularly shaped parcel. The property has been maintained in lovely condition as of the time of its landmarking. The site features large, mature trees and unique plantings.

The stuccoed, two-story structure is situated on an east-west axis. The house has a relatively low-pitched cross-gabled roof of Mission tiles. Attic vents are barrel and square tiles set into the gables of the roofs.

The home was constructed for Martin and Joyce Christopher and was pictured in a July 17, 1938, San Diego Union article. The A.L. & A.E. Dennstedt Building Company built the house. The company was also featured in a 1938 San Diego Union article as builders of “palatial residences, modern homes, commercial structures and apartment houses.”

Martin Christopher was born in 1868 in Wisconsin. His wife, Emma, was born in 1870 in Missouri. They moved to La Mesa in 1911 after having acquired the lot and several adjacent lots in 1910.

Emma was the president of La Mesa Woman’s Club from 1914 to 1917. She died in 1922. Martin was the chairman of the building committee for the Central Congregational Church. He was also a member of the executive committee for the city’s 1916 Easter Morning Pilgrimage to Mount Nebo. The Easter Sunrise Services on Mount Helix were predated by those on Mount Nebo.

Martin subsequently married Joyce (nee McBride) Clemens in 1935. She was born in Illinois in 1887. She moved to La Mesa in 1921 with her then-husband Ralph Clemens. He died about a year later.

Martin and Joyce decided in 1938 to build their dream house at this site. Mrs. Flora Robertson moved here in 1950 and recalls that Joyce Christopher gained some renown for her lawn parties.



*Above: Named after Martin Christopher, the first owner, this home is a distinct and well-built example of Mission Revival architecture in La Mesa and San Diego County.*

Martin and Joyce both died in a car accident in late January 1953 when the car in which they were riding rear-ended a tractor-trailer on Torrey Pines grade. He was 78. She was 65.

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### “President’s Address” *continued from p. 1*

The book release will feature books for sale and signing as well as a short presentation by myself. The event goes from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Parking is at the lots next to the Mt. Helix Fire Station on 10105 Vivera Drive. A shuttle will be provided to the park—no parking is allowed at the top that day.

If you can’t attend, we will have an upcoming History Roundtable presentation and book signing this winter.

### Christmas Party

Don’t forget our annual McKinney House Christmas Party on Sunday, December 6, from 2 to 4 p.m. We are also working on our participation in this year’s La Mesa Craft Beer and Wine Winter Festival on December 5.

Please check out our website, <http://lamesahistory.com>, and our Facebook site for the latest on upcoming events, including in-the-works events and programs. Don’t forget to “friend” us on Facebook if you are social media savvy.

Feel free to contact me directly to discuss any ideas you might have to help us continue our invaluable mission of preserving La Mesa’s history.

## ArtiFACTS: Antique Stereoscopes



The stereoscope was introduced in the early 19th century. Stereoscopes use two nearly identical images, each taken a few inches to the side of the other. When viewed through two lenses, the result is the illusion of a three-dimensional picture.

Because the stereoscope preceded the publication of photographs in newspapers and magazines, stereoviewers were seen as forms of entertainment. People would pass around the stereoscope to see all sorts of beautiful scenes that they otherwise might never have seen.

After Queen Victoria took a fancy to the stereoscope at the Crystal Place Exposition in 1851, stereo viewing became all the rage in Britain. The United States trailed for some years, but in 1862, Oliver Wendell Holmes invented a small handheld stereograph viewer, which soon dominated the world market and became the standard stereoscopic device for decades.

The stereoscope slides that were produced allowed people to tour the world from their own homes. The most popular slides were travelogue-type slides that showed the world from the abbeys and countrysides of Europe to the pyramids and tombs of ancient Egypt, to the farms of the Midwest, or to the cities of New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Yellowstone's establishment as the first national park was furthered by a series of stereoviews of the area that were distributed to members of Congress in 1871.

## La Mesa Through the Years

Crime was easy as pie in early La Mesa. Retyped from the *La Mesa Scout*, Friday, November 18, 1921.

### C.C. Updyke's Bake Shop Broken Into Saturday Night

C.C. Updyke's bakery was broken into and ransacked last Saturday night, the robbers getting away with several pies and \$15 in cash from the cash register.

Entrance was forced to the shop by the rear door, the screen which had been torn off, and the key which is always left in the lock from the inside being pushed out and lying on the floor.

The case has been turned over to Marshal Mercer. To date no arrests have been made.

Claud C. Updyke's bakery existed on La Mesa Boulevard (then Lookout Avenue) near Palm Avenue for a few years. It was called the New La Mesa Bakery. Updyke's wife, Gertrude, was an operator for Pacific Telephone & Telegraph. The Updykes lived on Date Avenue.



### Grable's "Hillcrest" Residence, circa 1912

*Pioneering local developer Sherman Grable's modern residence sits atop this prominent knoll on south Date Avenue. This long-admired home, now a City of La Mesa historical landmark, is still one of our community's architectural gems*

**ASK THE HISTORIAN:** Have a question about La Mesa history? Send it to us, and we will feature answers to YOUR questions. Email your questions to [admin@lamesahistory.sdcoxmail.com](mailto:admin@lamesahistory.sdcoxmail.com).

**SUGGESTIONS?** Please share story ideas or comments about this newsletter to the editor, Ben Abel, at [abelrober@gmail.com](mailto:abelrober@gmail.com).



## In the Spotlight San Diego OASIS: “Older Age Success Is Sweet”

ADULT EDUCATION, PART 1

**O**ASIS is a national nonprofit network focused on successful aging through lifelong learning, healthy living, and intergenerational community service. Locally, San Diego OASIS offers classes in arts and crafts, business, financial and legal matters, computers and technology, exercise and dance, food and nutrition, health and wellness, history and the humanities, language and literature, personal development and enrichment, and theater and music. It also organizes offsite adventures, day tours, and extended trips year-round. San Diego OASIS’ catalogs are available three times a year. My wife and I enjoy classes there, sometimes together, sometimes separately. There is something for everyone. Let me tell you how this great organization started.

OASIS was founded in St. Louis in 1982 by Marylen Mann. Newly retired, Mann was extremely unhappy to discover what was passing as older adult activi-

### Upcoming Events

#### ***Around Mt. Helix Book Release Party***

Saturday, October 24, 4:30–6:30 p.m.  
Mt. Helix Nature Theatre, Mt. Helix Park

#### **10th Annual Historic Home Tour**

Saturday, November 7, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.  
Featuring Downtown (La Mesa Village)  
and Date Avenue (Mt. Nebo) areas

#### **Annual Members’ Christmas Party**

Sunday, December 6, 2–4 p.m.  
McKinney House and Archives  
8369 University Avenue

ties (playing bingo seemed to be it). She felt that older adults deserved better. Marylen approached the May Company, a department store chain (now Macy’s), and asked for full funding and free space for a stimulating adult education program for those over 50. The May Company agreed, and thus OASIS was born.

The Mission Valley Macy’s is the largest location of the San Diego OASIS. Macy’s provides free space on the third floor of its apparel store. The other location is hosted by the Escondido Joslyn Senior Center. San Diego OASIS also offers programs at more than 20 partner locations, such as libraries and community centers.

After the May Company/Macy’s corporate funding ceased, OASIS relied on donations, grants, and sponsorships while continuing to offer high-quality programs for the 50-plus age group as well as the neediest children in our communities (more on OASIS’s intergenerational programs later). San Diego County’s population of those over 65 will double in size in the next 15 years; the fastest growing age group is 80 and over. Clearly, San Diego OASIS programs are needed more than ever.

Beyond stimulating our intellect and taking care of our health as we age, San Diego OASIS runs one of the largest volunteering programs—almost 1,000 OASIS members are actively volunteering today.

As literacy tutors, San Diego OASIS’s volunteers mentor children to build their reading, writing, and language skills. After completing training, volunteers are placed in local elementary schools, where they volunteer once a week, one-on-one, helping K-4 students. La Mesa/Spring Valley School District is one of the participating districts. Most of the schools serve at-risk students and are classified as Title I schools.

Another well-regarded and evidence-based intergenerational program is called CATCH Healthy Habits, designed to combat rapidly increasing childhood obesity. The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research released a new report noting that more Californians than ever—a quarter of the population—are obese.

CATCH Healthy Habits is a unique intergenerational physical activity and nutrition program for kids K-5 and adults over 50. This program combats childhood obesity by engaging adults as mentors to teach healthy lifelong habits to kids. Classes meet once a week for 8 weeks. Hourlong sessions include games, a lesson on nutrition, and a healthy snack.

“Spotlight” continues on p. 5

**“Spotlight”** *cont. from p. 4*

Simona Valanciute is the executive director of San Diego OASIS. She has been at its helm for 3 years now. Her role is to oversee the programs as well as work on strategic planning, policy, and fundraising. Simona works closely with the 9-member board of directors.



*Simona Valanciute*

San Diego OASIS relies heavily on volunteers for daily operations. Every day, a different volunteer team helps OASIS members with class and trip registration, class check-ins, database management, and other functions.

Simona’s challenge is to strengthen and grow the organization to meet the increasing demand for services. She would like everyone to know about San Diego OASIS and appreciate its critical role in the community. Smiling, Simona says there are many heartwarming success stories at San Diego OASIS. And I can attest: there are definitely no couch potatoes at OASIS.

Charles Van Vechten, a second-generation La Mesa and San Diego OASIS board member, states “I bring a new perspective in terms of my age, and also my profession ... which is marketing and branding. I am close to, but not quite in the age demographic for OASIS, but I see its importance through the eyes of my mother and her friends. Keeping active and

giving back to the community, exercising your body and your mind, are keys to a long and fulfilling life, and OASIS delivered this every day to thousands of those 50+.” Charles notes that OASIS has been one of San Diego County’s best-kept secrets, and the board is eager to change that.

Two outstanding examples of those thriving through OASIS are Elinor Smith and Lola Sparrowhawk Kohen. Elinor is 82. At age 71, she became a certified exercise trainer. Elinor teaches two classes at OASIS: Gentle Strength, Balance, and Flexibility, and Low-Impact Aerobics and Strength Training. She also takes two upper-level Spanish classes at OASIS.

Lola teaches Creative Writing and Introduction to Creative Writing at OASIS. She won an international book award for Best Political Thriller in 2015. Lola says, “I got my creative writing start by taking OASIS classes, and now I have a writing career. If I can do it, so can you.” Two organizational slogans (Nike and Kaiser Permanente) best paraphrase Lola: “Just do it and thrive.”

San Diego OASIS welcomes current and legacy donations of all sizes. To learn more about San Diego OASIS, email [infoSanDiegoOasis@oasisnet.org](mailto:infoSanDiegoOasis@oasisnet.org), call 619.881.6262/760.796.6020, or visit [www.sandiegooasis.org](http://www.sandiegooasis.org).

—Aaron Landau

**IN A FUTURE ISSUE:** Adult Education Part II: La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center.

## Collection Connection

Donor	Donated Item(s)
John Steiger	CD of Spring Valley, Golf Drive, area Copies of photographs CD of John Muir School Junior Traffic Patrol
Keith Dindinger	Eleven booklets of Mt. Helix Easter Sunrise services
Jill Hurlburt	Copies of Sheldon/Hurlburt family photos
Cathy Gasper for Tina Huffman	Copy of 1922–1936 Hotel La Mesa register

## La Mesa Historical Society Board of Directors

President	Jim Newland
1st Vice-President	Wade Douglas
2nd Vice-President	George Fahouris
Secretary	Sharon Crockett
Treasurer	Rod Whitlow
Directors-at-Large	Ed Blackman Ken D'Angelo Suda House Linda Rankin Pat Stromberg Kathy Tinsley Donna Niemeier
Past President	Donna Niemeier

**Board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.**



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(619) 466-0197  
www.lamesahistoricalsociety.com

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Cut along line and mail the section below with your check.

### AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY Membership Application

The Society depends on membership dues, bequests, and fundraising activities to support the restoration and preservation of local history.

The La Mesa Historical Society operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 house/museum located at 8369 University Avenue (at the corner of Pine Street) in La Mesa. Open 1-4 p.m. every second and fourth Saturday of the month or by appointment. Group tours are available. Call (619) 466-0197 for further information. *Lookout Avenue* is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society. Our address is:

La Mesa Historical Society  
P.O. Box 882  
La Mesa, CA 91944

Lookout Avenue was the original name of La Mesa Boulevard from the 1890s until the City Council voted to change the name in 1940. Lookout Avenue was La Mesa's main street.

#### Membership Levels:

- \$500 Benefactor
- \$250 Patron
- \$100 Sponsor/Organization
- \$50 Sustaining
- \$25 Family
- \$20 Individual
- \$10 Student

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
City/State: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a volunteer in the following area(s):

- Docent/Education
- Grounds/Building
- Events
- Archives/House