



La Mesa Historical Society

# LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 38, Issue 1

Winter 2013

## Going Histrionic

Aaron Landau, President

Welcome to 2013 and the end of La Mesa's Centennial. Her second century commences. In addition to the work on the McKinney house, rear archives repository, outhouse, and 100-year-old tree having been done within the past year plus, the façade of the Palermo Archives Building has recently been reconfigured and the morning glory trellis has been made secure. Thus the historical society finds itself structurally in great shape.

In terms of events and projects, we came through with flying colors with the board and docents carrying the load task wise this year as has been done in the past. So much was accomplished with so few. This is especially marvelous and "miraculous" considering the additional activities we "signed up for" to prominently participate in La Mesa's centennial year. This was all on top of what we usually "host" in any given year. As a result we had such tremendously positive exposure in the community. Something one cannot put a price on.

My concerns as I enter the last six months of my tenure as president revolve around the issue of how lean we are number wise in terms of members supporting the work that needs to be done to continue to carry out the mission and tasks that keep the society operating in a vibrant matter. Long term the amount of energy that we generate even in a non-centennial year is unsustainable given the low number of active players and likely attrition.

*Friends, La Mesans, La Mesa Historical Society Members, give me your ears. I come to encourage, not to castigate. The opportunities that people miss do forever evade them. Their good intentions are lost in time. So let it be with those LMHS members who miss a chance to contribute some time and energy of their choice to the maintenance and well-being of their historical society in addition to their financial support. O, LMHS members, seize this opportunity to volunteer in some capacity just a few hours a month or every other month at most. Step on to the stage and take an enhanced role in the stage production of "LMHS Presents".*

Please call the society at (619) 466-0197 or call me directly at (619) 244-2470 and let us know that you would like to volunteer in some capacity. We have a list of possibilities for you to choose from. May you have a healthy and safe 2013.

## La Mesa Centennial Home Tour – Another Success

Approximately 300 people enjoyed our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Home Tour on Saturday, November 3rd. Since 2012 was La Mesa's centennial year, the Historical Society chose homes from the Date Avenue Historic District. Visitors were transported by Old Town Trolley. The homes were built between 1910 and 1930. The visitors saw five beautifully maintained and decorated homes hosted by their owners. The owners are Cecile Walters, Matt and Matina Kleiner, Al Skalecky and Carrie Sebold, Kevin and Knikki Hewitt, and Rolando and Rachel Flores.

We would like to thank the many people who helped make this Home Tour another great success. Thank you to our sponsors and supporters: Laura Lothian from Sotheby's International Realty, Virginia McKenzie from Mostly Mission, EDCO, La Mesa Foothills Art Association, Old Town Trolley drivers, classic car owners, and florist Sandy White. Kudos to our many loyal docents and most of all our homeowners, without whose generous participation there would be no home tour.

In seven years, the Tour has presented 38 historic homes to over 2000 visitors. The seven tours have generated a net income of \$27,877 for the La Mesa Historical Society preservation and maintenance projects.

## In the Spotlight

### Gordon Jones

Many of you already know Gordon Jones. He has been highly active in our La Mesa Historical Society for over a decade. It didn't take Gordon long to become a board member and then go on to become the board President. Eight of the 12 years he's been a member, he served as President of the board. Gordon helped the society become more active in the community. Asserting the Historical Society as a force in the community, and getting city council and the mayor involved were major accomplishments.

Gordon has always loved history, especially historic homes. Before moving to the San Diego area, Gordon and his wife, Carol, lived in Denver. There, they restored a 1921 Italian Revival home in an historic district of Denver. He was the president-elect of Historic Denver, an organization similar to SOHO in San Diego. Gordon was instrumental in starting the La Mesa historic home tour that is so successful today. He organized the first one 7 years ago and continues to help organize today. This one day event is a year round job. He's an ambassador to home owners across La Mesa; urging these home owners to open their fabulous homes to hundreds of wandering strangers. He gently pushes for the good cause of sharing history. Gordon has also been actively

involved in the landmarking of several La Mesa historical gems.

When Gordon isn't learning about history, he's out on a quest to experience new things. He and Carol love to get out and see things. They love to travel and to try new foods from all cultures. They want to experience the history that's happening now.

Gordon has a degree in Art History with a specialization in Architecture from the University of Oregon.

I met Gordon for the first time to conduct this interview. We met at Starbucks and having never officially met Gordon face to face I worried how I would know how to find him. I had only talked to Gordon on the phone for a few short minutes to arrange the interview. But before I entered Starbucks, I knew who Gordon was. He was the man making friends with people outside, bringing strangers together. I knew from only talking to Gordon for two minutes the day before that this was exactly the man Gordon was. He was petting a dog, talking to the owner, and bringing in other dog owners to the conversation. Everyone speaking to him was genuinely happy and no one was bothered being pulled into a conversation with a stranger.



It seems that everyone knows Gordon. Sitting in Starbucks he said hello to a few people walking in to get their coffee. And he called them each by

name. It seems that everyone who knows Gordon likes Gordon. If you don't know Gordon already, that is not a deterrent to being his friend. Just say hello, and it's like you're old friends already.

### **Fun facts about Gordon:**

Favorite book: Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand

Favorite sport: College Football

Country music or Rock music? Country

Coffee or Tea? Coffee

Rain or Sunshine? Sunshine

Chocolate or Vanilla? Chocolate

Dogs or Cats? Dogs

Action movies or dramas? Depends on what it is.

Red or White wine? White



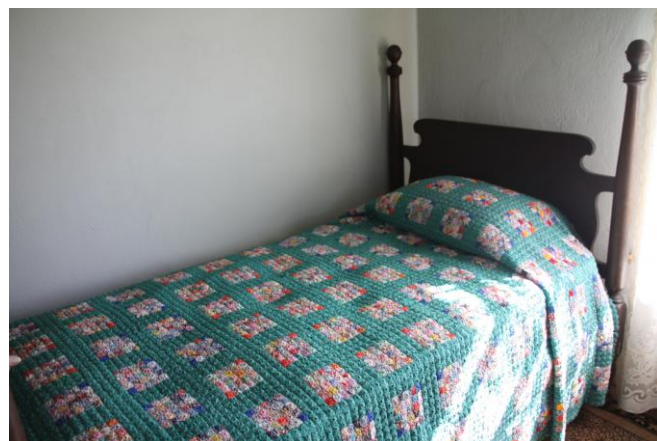
## **ArtiFACTS!**

### **Yo-Yo Quilt**



The yo-yo quilt that is on the bed in one of the upstairs bedrooms in the McKinney House was made in the 1930s by Eva May Maxwell. Ms. Maxwell was Cromwell McKinney's mother-in-law. Although difficult to see in photographs, the quilt is made of small pieces of fabric formed into rosettes. They are then sewn together to create the quilt. Although "quilt" may not be the best way to describe this blanket, as it does not have

backing and is not quilted at all. It is light in weight and best used as a summer spread. Yo-yo's are also known as "Bon-Bon" or "Popcorn" quilts.



## **Christmas Open House**

On Sunday, December 9 the annual Christmas Open House was held at the McKinney House. This popular event provides an opportunity for members and guests to enjoy an afternoon of hot apple cider, warm cookies and gingerbread (thanks to Sharon Crockett and Ed and Beth Blackman) and holiday cheer. A raffle was held with gifts donated by Board Members. Many thanks to all the volunteers that make this event possible.

## **About Town**

### **Dr. Andrew G. Smith, Jr. Comes to Town**

Andrew G. Smith, Ph.D.

(Continued from Fall 2012 issue.)

When we last left our hero, Dr. Andrew G. Smith, Jr., he was showering in a barbershop restroom courtesy of Clint McBride instead of taking spit baths in his office.

Here we have a man without a domicile or a car, working as an osteopath in late 1920s La Mesa. Dr. Smith had a portable business. He walked. He carted his doctor's bag as well as his treatment table along to appointments. His longest house call was from downtown La Mesa to 70<sup>th</sup> Street, about two miles one way, with table and bag in hand.





Eventually he acquired a car and his practice grew. He came to know most of the folks in La Mesa. There was quite a collection of swatches in the fabric of the community in the center of

town. Norman Rockwell's small town Americana - West Coast version. Let's take a walk down Main Street that is Lookout Avenue, the name for La Mesa Boulevard until 1940.

- ◆ Henry Reed, owner and editor of the La Mesa Scout just west of the train tracks
- ◆ McBride's barbershop, just east of the tracks
- ◆ Charlie Risdon, clothing storeowner
- ◆ Joe and Betty Flax, dry goods storeowners
- ◆ Reuben Levy, La Mesa Hardware
- ◆ Murray Kellock, RexAll pharmacist at the southeast corner of Palm and Lookout Avenue
- ◆ Maxwell's Furniture
- ◆ Pete's Place, local tavern and eatery
- ◆ On the north, the town's largest market owned by Cliff Sawyer
- ◆ Farther east Elmer Drew and his Ford garage. There were several gas stations and a car dealership (Jack Hanna Pontiac).

Not a full map of downtown La Mesa in the late 1920s and 1930s. A sample of business life on Lookout Avenue. The past whose flavor remains with us. Simpler times with a slower pace. Wisps which linger if you visit downtown La Mesa and breathe in the air. As you take a walk down the street today, wave and say hello to those storeowners and shopkeepers of a time gone by and those who are still with us.

## Calling All La Mesans

We are searching for community members, whether they are LMHS members or not, who grew up in La Mesa in the 1930s, 1940s. or 1950s. We would like to interview them for an article to appear in this newsletter on their early experiences in our fine town. The article would appear in our "About Town" section. Please call Aaron Landau at (619) 698-8309 if you or someone you know is interested.



## Vintage Yard Sale Update

Here are your long awaited results of the Vintage Yard Sale last June. We are HAPPY to report that the sale was a GREAT success! There were many happy shoppers who came to claim their treasures. And in return, the society collected close to \$2,000 to put towards improving and updating our archival system.

For those of you who donated items for the sale, we Thank You. To those of you who supported the event by making purchases we also thank you and trust that you are still enjoying your treasures. The few remaining unsold items were donated to a local thrift shop

Share story ideas, comments and suggestions with Editor Erin Ben-Judah at [erin.benjudah@hotmail.com](mailto:erin.benjudah@hotmail.com)

## Do you know where this picture was taken?

(Answer found on page 7)



### *A Special Welcome for the Society's New Members*

Lisa Hamann  
Keith Dindinger  
Carol Temes  
Greg & Shawna Eichmel  
Cecile Walters  
Matt & Matina Kleiner  
Al Skalecky  
Carrie Sebold  
Kevin & Knikki Hewitt  
Rolando & Rachel Flores  
Cecelia Brock  
Chris & Karen Hinman  
Michele Hottel

## On Board

### Pat Stromberg

Pat Stromberg is an extremely active woman. Her collections fill the walls of her house. Her passion is traveling, and her house contains artifacts from all over the world. Pat has been to every continent at least once. Africa is her favorite place to travel. In addition to traveling, she is very involved with our Historical Society, a Mystery Book Club, and the San Diego Museum of Art. She also is a season ticket holder to the La Jolla Playhouse. Along with collecting ethnographic art, Pat is active in antiquing and has a collection of rug beaters that fills her family room walls. She has been collecting rug beaters since 1968 and now has a collection of over 52.

Pat was born and raised in Boston, but moved to the San Diego area soon after marrying a Marine. They looked forward to living in a place without



snow. She and her husband were both teachers in the San Diego Area. In Boston, Pat taught children with special needs. When she moved to San Diego, she became a reading teacher for elementary and junior high aged children. Pat loves working with kids, which is evident in that she was a teacher for over 40 years before retiring. Both of Pat's two children and four grandchildren live in the area. Her kids went to Grossmont High School and have stayed close. That's one of the things she finds so charming about La Mesa – people love it and families stay here, children don't want to move away.

Pat has been involved with the Society for 10 years and has served on the board for 6 of those years. Gordon Jones originally got her involved with the Society. She loves serving on the board and learning about La Mesa History and the people involved in its history. In addition to serving on the board, Pat was also on the Archival Committee this past year. She and the committee worked to identify and organize everything contained in the McKinney House. This led to the Vintage Yard Sale that was held last June that was so successful, whose proceeds went straight back into storage for the archives, among other things. Pat would love to see more space for storage so the society would be able to gather more historical artifacts and be able to keep them organized well. She would also love to see more space for research, if money were no object, an extension of the Palermo building would do just the trick. Pat's favorite Historical Society events are the Christmas Tea and the Spring Open House – both events which involve members of the Society

coming to the house and appreciating the artifacts within.

### **Fun facts about Pat!**

Favorite Book – Moby Dick

Favorite Movie – *Hugo*

Car ride or Plane ride? Car ride – to be able to get out and touch things.

Chocolate or Vanilla? Chocolate.

Dogs or Cats? Both

City or Country? Both. La Mesa is perfect since your so close to both downtown and Alpine, etc.

Watch a play or See a movie? Watch a play.

Seafood or Mexican food? Mexican food.

Coffee or Tea? Coffee.

Cake or Pie? Pie.

## **Upcoming Events**

**Antique Street Faire - Sunday,  
March 31st in the Village**

## **Do you know what school was this photo taken at?**

(Answer on page 7)



## Collection Connection

From now on in each edition of the newsletter we intend to list the names and contributions of individuals, families, or organizations that donated archival material to the society and what they donated. This time the list is of all donations from January through November 2012.

We thank all these donors individually and collectively.

Donor	Donated Items
Debby Signaio	La Mesa Baseball Memorabilia
Grossmont High School Museum	GUHSD Board of Trustee Minutes
Suzanne McHenry	Twenty Inch Kestner German Doll
James Polak	Movie Footage of La Mesa Scouts 1934-40
Kevin Dewey	1 Fletcher Hills Scrapbook and 4 Ben Polak Scrapbooks
Jerri Tuftgland	Fite Family Home Movies Circa 1950s
Ron Reinvan	Aerial Photo of Helix High School Circa 1965
Alex Kutty	10 DVDs of the Miss La Mesa Pageants 1986-2005
Robert Rothstein	Helix High School Memorabilia 1958-1992
Pete Cuthbert	Collection of La Mesa Planning Commission Minutes, Reports, and Maps

Al Higdon	La Mesa Organization Cookbooks
La Mesa Rotary	Diamond Anniversary Wine Glasses
La Mesa Rotary (Keith Dindinger)	Group Membership Pictures, Club Applications and Organization Papers, Mount helix Easter Sunrise Programs 1978-2001



### ***Board of Directors***

President	Aaron Landau
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice Pres.	Jim Newland
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice Pres.	Ruth Contino
Secretary	Sharon Crockett
Treasurer	Rod Whitlow
Directors-at-Large	Ed Blackman
	Wade Douglas
	Suda House
	Linda Rankin
	Pat Stromberg
	Kathy Tinsley
Past President	Donna Niemeier

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

Photo on page 5: Town Christmas Tree, Lookout Ave & Spring Street, view west, c1920.

Photo on page 6: Christmas Tree, Briar Patch Elementary, 1963





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8369 University, La Mesa  
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(619) 466-0197  
www.lamesahistory.com

## Change Service Requested



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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 fund-raising 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 1-4pm 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.

- ☐ \$250 Patron
- ☐ \$100 Sponsor/Organization
- ☐ \$50 Sustaining
- ☐ \$20 Family
- ☐ \$15 Individual
- ☐ \$5 Student

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_

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

I would like to be a volunteer in the following areas:

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