

Spring 2023

lookout avenue

LA MESA
History Center

IN THIS ISSUE

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS	2
BOARD OF DIRECTORS - SLATE 2023-24	3
MARY KELLEY	5
SPRING MEET ME AT THE MCKINNEY HOUSE EVENTS	6
BRINGING THE HISTORY CENTER TO LA MESA	8
LANDSCAPE RENOVATION UPDATE	9
HISTORY OF LA MESA WELFARE ASSOCIATION	10



The NEWSLETTER of the LA MESA HISTORY CENTER

VOLUME 48, #2

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Things are hopping at the La Mesa History Center!

Events ramp up at the McKinney House and offsite

Since the beginning of 2023, the LMHC has held three onsite Meet Me at the McKinney House events and participated in three community-based events including the June 3rd we will be participating in the La Mesa Flag Day Parade. Our next onsite event will be the Annual Meeting which will be Sunday, June 25th from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Be sure to get there early to take advantage of the Sweet Treats ice cream truck that will be onsite between 2:00 pm and 3:00 pm!

Research activities continue to grow

The Archives Research Room is a bustling place every Saturday afternoon from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Whether it is local homeowners researching their houses, SDSU interns working on the historic property registry or our dedicated group of volunteers working on image cataloging and preservation photocopying, the tables are usually full. Jim Newland has also been working hard on preliminary research for several homeowners that are interested in pursuing historic designations for their homes.

New sign brings new focal point to landscape design

The new La Mesa History Center sign in the front corner of the yard has provided a striking new feature to draw attention to the site. Additionally, it allows us to more clearly identify when we are open through the addition of "Open" placards that are attached to the sign. Check out the article in this newsletter for more details on additional landscape enhancements coming soon.

Thank you to the La Mesa History Center Board

As we come to the end of the fiscal year and approach the Annual Meeting, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for all of their efforts this past year.

Special thanks to Kari Dodson, Dave Cline, and Jeremy Martinson who will be rotating off of the Board. Kari has been instrumental in supporting the operations of the Center, researching our new security system and investigating options of new ways to engage with our membership. Dave brought his expertise as a historian to the Board, advising on collection development and our SDSU internships and Jeremy brought his skills and acumen as a financial planner to the position of Treasurer this year.

Thanks as well to Sharon Smith who will be stepping down as Secretary after four terms in the position. Sharon will be continuing on the Board as a Member-at-Large. Kristine Allesio will be stepping into the Secretary position, moving over from her role as Membership Vice President this year.

From our first in-person Home Tour in several years, to holding numerous other educational events, as well as making tremendous progress on the landscape project, the La Mesa History Center has accomplished so much this year. I can't wait to see what is next!

***Veronica Martzahl, President
La Mesa History Center***

BOARD OF DIRECTORS SLATE 2023-24

The following slate is being recommended by the Board of Directors and will be voted upon by the general membership at the June 25 Annual Meeting.

Executive Board

President – Veronica Martzahl
Vice President – Tracey Stotz
Membership Vice President – Steven Christiansen
Secretary – Kristine Alessio
Co-Treasurers – Spencer and Stephanie Peters
Past President – Jim Newland

At-large Board Members

Dianne McCann
Brenna Peirson
Sharon Smith

Continuing At-large Board Members (terms in progress)

Samantha Alberts
Donna Bloomer
Sheryl Castro
Steven Churchill
Michele Greenberg-McClung
John Richardson

Annual Meeting

June 25, 2023

2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

McKinney House and Archives Research Room



Sweet Treats Ice Cream truck

2:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Free Snacks

McKinney House
Open
for tours

Crafts
and
Games

Updates from the Board

and

Election of the

2023-2024

LMHC Board

La Mesa History Center Receives Generous Bequest from Long-time Volunteer

Mary Kelley was a fixture of the La Mesa Historical Society for over a decade. Starting in the mid-1980's, Kelly and her husband William "Bill" Hastings were hands-on volunteers, chipping in to help with event planning and execution. She frequently ran the food line for annual Ice Cream Socials, Champagne brunches, and Christmas Parties. She served as 2nd Vice President from 1987-1988 and again in 1996-1997. Mary was a docent for the McKinney house and staffed the LMHS table for community events such as Oktoberfest. She also supported the work of the Board by heading up the Nominating Committee and supported the work of the Archives by leading the Accessions Committee for multiple years. In addition, her husband Bill served as Treasurer for two terms from 1995-1997.

Mary and Bill moved to Virginia in the late 1990s, but she kept the La Mesa Historical Society in her thoughts when she wrote her Last Will and Testament in 1999. Among her beneficiaries she included the Society to receive 10% of the funds from the sale of a property she owned in Los Angeles.

Mary Kelley passed away on January 11, 2022 in Virginia. Her estate was overseen by her stepson, Robert Hastings, and the La Mesa History Center Board sends its sincerest condolences to him and his family. We are immensely grateful for the bequest that we received this past February that will allow us to prioritize several projects for the McKinney House and grounds as well as support the work of the Archives. In honor of this gift, the Board has purchased a memorial brick in Mary Kelley's honor for our landscaping project.



Spring 2023 Blooms with Meet Me at the McKinney House Events

Visitors to the McKinney House on Saturday, February 11th were treated to extra exhibits of quilts and handcrafted lace samples from the LMHC collections. They also had the opportunity to create useful and beautiful handicrafts of their own such as potholders and braided rugs.

Dreary weather did not dampen the spirits of the La Mesa Woman's Club members who visited the McKinney House on Saturday, March 11th for a special event to highlight the acquisition of the group's organization records and the recent exhibit of their records in the McKinney House. Brenna Peirson, curator of the exhibit, along with McKinney House docent Karen Kill, welcomed Sandi Phoenix, Darcy Barghols, Margie Howard-Hartman, Marsha McDonald, Pat Spear, and Pat Kelly to the exhibit for tea and conversation.

The weather was much nicer for the April 15th event that highlighted the history of cooking and kitchen gadgets. LMHC Board member Samantha Albert and San Diego State University Intern Angela Douglas quizzed visitors on historic kitchen appliances and shared a wide variety of cookbooks from local and regional groups and organizations.

Meet Me at the McKinney House

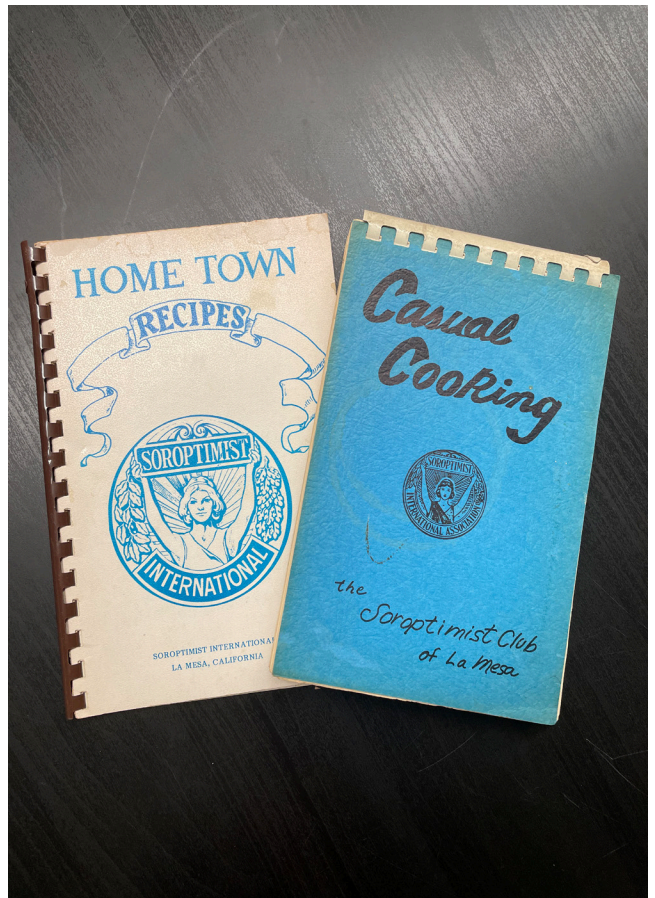
Event

Saturday

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Free and open to the public





Bringing the History Center to La Mesa

The La Mesa History Center was out and about the Greater La Mesa area, connecting with the communities that we support and document.

Board members Jim Newland and John Richardson spent Sunday, March 19th at the 25th Annual Rolando Street Fair. The LMHC is a long-time participant in this event, and it was great to re-engage with this neighborhood after a few years absence due to Covid followed by a rain-out last year. Many of the LMHC's earliest research materials document this area and the event highlights that the mission of the LMHC to preserve the history of not just of the City of La Mesa, but also the Greater La Mesa area.

Thanks to the La Mesa Village Association for providing the LMHC with a free, community table at the La Mesa Farmers' Market on Friday, April 7th. Jim and John, along with Veronica Martzahl staffed a table and engaged with over 50 members of the community who stopped by to browse through informational binders and look at pictures of the La Mesa from the past.



Finally, Jim, Veronica and Samantha Alberts staffed the LMHC table at the La Mesa Earth Day Festival held on Saturday, April 22nd at MacArthur Park. In addition to sharing reference information related to the history of La Mesa Parks, the trio passed out coloring sheets of the McKinney House and early La Mesa, as well as lemons from the trees on the McKinney House property.

LANDSCAPE RENOVATION UPDATE

History Center Monument Sign Is Up

The monument sign, complete with the updated logo, has finally been installed. Although it took a great deal of time due to permit issues, it was worth the wait. Feedback has been positive from those walking the neighborhood. Neighbors have also raved about the gorgeous blooms in the memorial rose garden. We are happy to add beauty to the area.

If you supported the landscape renovation project by purchasing an inscribed brick, those are all in. They line the front planter and west fence. Stop by and find yours. You can also attend the Annual Meeting and see all the site updates as well as your brick.

Next on the list are a display shed that will allow us to exhibit larger objects from the collection and a ramada to be placed near the southwest corner of the house to provide shade for summer programs. Architect Michele Hottel will be helping with the design and permits for those two projects.

Interpretive signs are also in the works with a unique one that will share the history of citrus in the area while also allowing us to share lemons from our producing trees.

Vice President Tracey Stotz, who is chairing the project, constantly reiterates, “We could not have gotten this far if it weren’t for the community support we have received. We are so appreciative!”

If you would like to donate to the project please log on to lamesahistory.org and click on the donate tab. There you can make a variable donation and note that you want it restricted to the landscape. Every little bit helps.



TODAY'S LA MESA COMMUNITY WELFARE ASSOCIATION HAS A STORIED HISTORY OF SERVICE WELL BEYOND ITS LONG-STANDING THRIFT STORE

Some Ninety-Two Years Ago the Ladies of La Mesa Stepped Up to Face the Daunting Challenges of the Great Depression Era—and formed one of the Community's enduring Institutions

Sarah “Nan” Coutts’ La Mesa Legacy is Traced to her, and many other notable La Mesa ladies’ efforts for supporting our Community’s Welfare.

Many have made their way through the La Mesa Thrift Store at the corner of Third and Lemon. One may take solace in finding themselves a great bargain on a second-hand antique, or gently-used clothing item. Some may realize the profits go to support a local non-profit charged with serving community members in need. Others may not.

Yet, the history of this long-standing La Mesa non-profit, community welfare organization is one that exemplifies far more than a popular thrift store. It is a history that needed to be revealed further. It is the story of a dedicated group of La Mesa ladies who stepped

up and gathered-together to assure that all those in need could be provided a helping hand. It is also a story that started in a time of staggering need and challenges, both locally and nationally--the Great Depression of the 1930s.

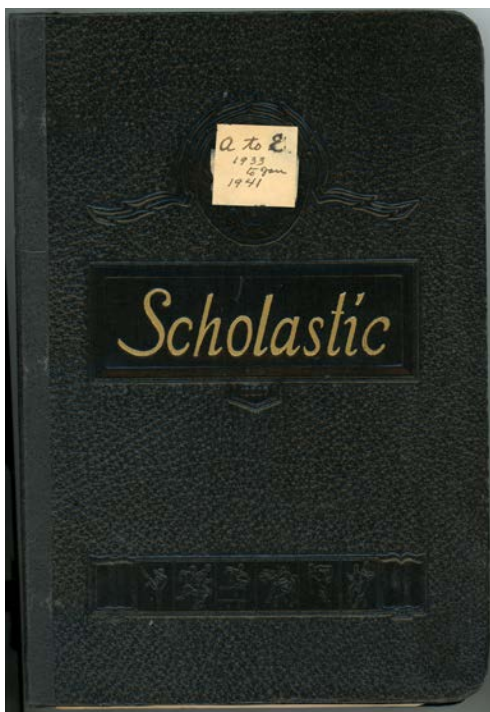


*La Mesa Welfare Association Thrift Store,
8340 Lemon Avenue.*

A Seemingly Simple Inquiry

A few weeks ago, Suzi Sterling, current President of the La Mesa Welfare Association came to the History Center Research Archives to inquire on what information we had on the organization's origins. She had heard that the Welfare Association had been around since the 1930s. That it had been founded by one of La Mesa's most notable ladies, and that the group's lore included that the thrift store had started on the front porch of one of the founding members.

But what had really driven Suzi to seek the History Center's help were a series of hand-written ledger books. Found on the back shelves of the Thrift Store office, these small ledgers listed detailed notes of aid provided to those La Mesans in need during the years of the Great Depression. Recorded were hundreds of individual gifts of food baskets; shoes, clothing and Christmas presents for school children; medical and dental fees covered; cash for rent, and auto repairs and suits for men interviewing to obtain employment.



La Mesa Welfare Bureau Ledger 1933-1941, Vol. 1, La Mesa History Center.

These ledger entries pushed Suzi to ask: Who were these ladies? What motivated them? Was the organization's lore based in fact or legend? Did the Community then, or now, recognize these selfless acts of care, compassion, and generosity from the ladies of La Mesa?

San Diego and La Mesa's Community Chest Heritage

San Diegans had been stepping up to address the overall welfare of the community since the days of the Great Boom of the 1880s. In December 1888 San Diego leaders made a call for the creation of an "Associated Charities" organization to be a "clearing house" to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize benefits to those in need. By 1909 the Associated Charities of San Diego had been formally organized, changing their name to the Family Service Association in the 1930s. Other groups such as the San Diego Women's Public Welfare Association (1914), later the San Diego Welfare Association, provided support for a variety of community-based welfare needs and benevolence programs.

In addition, the national Community Chest Movement (originated in 1914 in Cleveland—and not just a "square on a Monopoly board"), had been established to help provide coordinated funding for community charity efforts. Community Chest organizations were replicated across the nation, including establishment of San Diego Community Chest in 1920. San Diego Community Chest represented well over 20 separate community-based charities, as well as providing grant funding to welfare service groups throughout the County. (Today that organization is the United Way of San Diego).



San Diego's Community Chest provided funding and support for regional welfare efforts, San Diego Union November 20, 1920.

By the time of the onset of the Great Depression in 1930, La Mesa had several organizations and institutions that provided specific community welfare services. Foremost, for the small City of roughly 2,500 residents, there were the efforts of the local religious institutions. The Central Congregational, First Methodist Episcopal, First Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, St. Andrew's Episcopal, and St. Martin's Catholic churches, along with their auxiliary organizations and committees, all provided support to church members and local families in need.

The La Mesa Women's Club, the oldest community service organization (est. 1902), also provided various support programs, providing clothing, shoes and

household supplies, food, and money to needy residents and families. Similarly, the ladies' auxiliary groups associated with men's service organizations such as the Masons, Kiwanis, and Odd Fellows lodges were known to organize community welfare events and fundraisers. Notably, the ladies Auxiliary to the American Legion Post was another key community support organization in providing aid to WWI veterans and their families. Additionally, the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) of the La Mesa and La Mesa Heights Grammar Schools and Grossmont High School were also providers of support to school children and families throughout their Districts.

Sarah "Nan" Coutts and the La Mesa Welfare Bureau

By early 1931, La Mesa and the nation had slipped into the depths of the Great Depression. Although La Mesa and San Diego County would not be as severely hit as many areas of the country, unemployment and financial hardship increased. Thus, in early 1931, the new Welfare Committee chairwomen of the La Mesa Grammar School PTA, 41-year old Sarah "Nan" Coutts (pronounced "coots" by Nan's family) saw the need for coordination of the various community welfare organizations in La Mesa.

English native Nan Coutts and her husband John Forster Coutts had moved from Mission Hills in San Diego to La Mesa in 1929, along with their three children Nanette (age 15), Susan (age 10) and Dick (age 8). Nan had moved with her parents from England to Fallbrook, CA in 1891. John was the grandson of the San Diego pioneers, Tennessee and U.S.-Mexican War veteran Col. Cave Johnson Coutts, and Ysidora Bandini of the Old Town Bandinis. Cave Coutts developed the historic Rancho Guajome in Vista). Nan's keen intellect, leadership

skills and recognition of community service were quickly tapped by her La Mesa colleagues and neighbors. Nan's membership in the La Mesa Women's Club along with other service and civic groups led to leadership roles almost immediately. With three school age children, she soon was placed in charge of La Mesa Grammar School's PTA Welfare Committee. Her key role as a community leader, especially for, and representing, the women of La Mesa, would last for decades.

In Fall 1931 Mrs. Coutts moved to organize the varied ladies' community welfare efforts into a more organized structure following a community chest model. On Tuesday evening October 20, 1931, representatives of the P.T.A., La Mesa Women's Club, American Legion Auxiliary, Eastern Star, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist churches gathered at the American Legion Hall on W. Orange Avenue to develop a "Community Welfare Bureau" to aid the sick and needy. The La Mesa Scout reported on this meeting in its October 23, 1931, weekly edition. Outside of St. Martin's pastor Joseph Mesny and Rev. G. R. Messig, the initial steering committee consisted entirely of the lady leaders of La Mesa's dispersed charity efforts.

As was typical of the times most of the Steering Committee's ladies were listed in the paper by their husbands' names (first names added here): Mrs. John Forster Coutts (Nan); Mrs. E. D. Miller (Florence), Mrs. Charles Condy (Catherine), Mrs. Leroy Bailey (Gertrude), Mrs. E. A. Samuels (Rosemont), Mrs. Louis Schirm (Harriet), Mrs. A. L. Eaton (Louise), Mrs. Benjamin Polak (Eulalie), Mrs. W.B. Dufferd (Inez), along with Grossmont Inn proprietress Ms. Grace Sperry-Godwin, and local teacher Miss Ethel Prosser.

ORGANIZE WELFARE BUREAU TO AID SICK AND NEEDY

A group of men and women, representing the numerous organizations and churches of La Mesa, met at the woman's club Tuesday afternoon to discuss the forming of a Community Welfare Bureau. The plans are to have a store centrally located, where donations of clothes, canned goods, preserves, etc., will be received and distributed according to the needs, to unemployment.

It is planned to sell clothing at a small fee when possible to defray expense of rent, etc. The store will be open only two afternoons a week at first, and the work of the store will be handled by the women of the different organizations in turn. The distribution of clothing has been handled, up to this time, by the P. T. A. of both Grossmont and La Mesa, the American Legion Auxiliary, the church guilds and the Spring Valley store. By joining forces the work can be done much more satisfactorily.

The organizations taking part in the forming of this Community Welfare Bureau are the P. T. A., the La Mesa Woman's club, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Eastern Star, the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist churches.

Those present at the first meeting were: Mr. James J. Foster Coutts, E. D. Miller, Chas. Condy, Leroy Bailey, E. A. Samuels, Louis Schirm, A. L. Eaton, Benj. Polak, W. B. Dufferd, Grace Godwin-Sperry, Miss Ethel Prosser, Father J. S. Mesny and Rev. G. R. Messig.

*La Mesa Scout
October 23, 1931*

The Steering Committee's plans appeared to mimic a community chest structure where all the charity/welfare efforts would be coordinated while working to raise funds for all. A key goal was to create a centrally located "store" in La Mesa to assist not only with gathering and distribution of clothing and goods, food, and supplies but to provide a place where funds could be raised through the sale of second-hand goods such as clothes, household items and local homemade preserves and canned goods. The hope was to be open two afternoons (Tuesdays and Fridays) a week to begin with, with the ladies of the various organizations staffing the store.

Two weeks later, at the second meeting, the initial officers of the La Mesa Community Welfare Bureau were elected. They included Mrs. Sarah Coutts (PTA), President; Mrs. Gertrude Bailey (American Legion Aux.), Vice President; Mrs. Inez Dufford (Baptist Church), Secretary; Mrs. Dr. F.E. (Ruth) Hale (dental/medical services), Treasurer; and Ms. Grace Godwin-Sperry (LM Women's Club), Publicity. In the November 6, 1931, Scout the Bureau made their first public call for used and outgrown shoes, clothing, curtains, rugs, or material for use in making quilts, comforters, and linens.

The Scout featured the work and efforts of the new organization and its leaders nearly weekly over the next few years. The initial success of the Bureau and its store were well documented. Publicity lead Grace Godwin Sperry writing regular articles for the local papers. It was reported that the well organized and efficient store had been visited by ladies from other local towns such as El Cajon who hoped to replicate the efforts to address their own unemployed and needy residents.

Soon, the regular columns for the Women's Club, American Legion and churches in the Scout also reported on the coordinated efforts that were enhancing their organizations previous efforts. For example, Mrs. Catherine Condy noted the efforts of the Women's Club members in her reports to the Club Board. Not only did Mrs. Condy remind the Club members of the importance of serving shifts at the store but urged them to sacrifice pleasant personal social affairs to volunteer in support the community welfare bureau's efforts.

The significance of the Bureau's initial Holiday season in 1931 was documented in how the Bureau and its member organizations were able to meet the

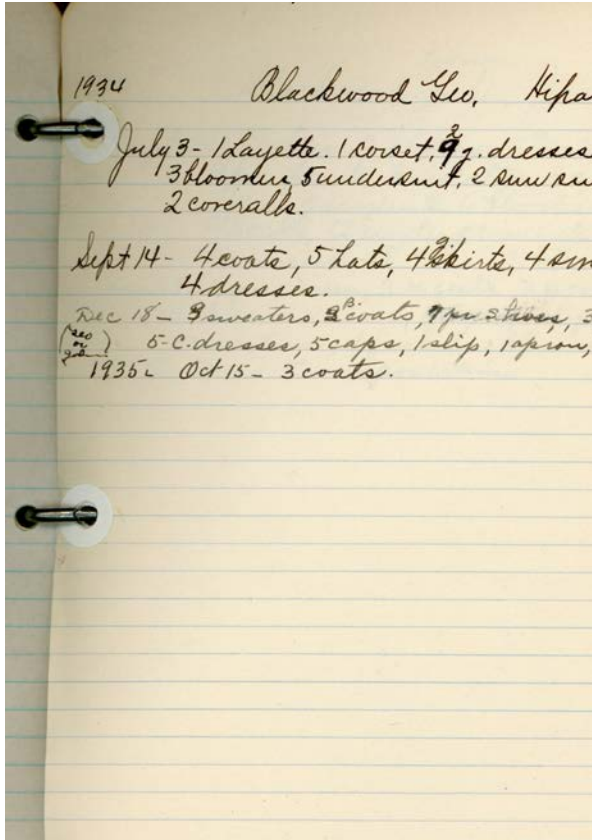
higher demand for Thanksgiving meals and Christmas gifts for the children in need during that economically challenging Winter of 1931. The Welfare Bureau's depth of individual charity and support activities is not only evident in the detailed entries in the Association's ledger books but recorded in the Scout's pages. Sperry explained the situation for many community members thusly:

"Many families are going to wonder what they have to be thankful for—some have health and few clothes; some have food and clothes but poor health—yet if we can say the right words of hope, we may make them thankful for something...next will come Christmas. Give us your old toys and we shall repaint them...then when the Christmas boxes are filled we shall have a few gifts for the kiddies that Santa may forget...let the little folks keep the dream."

In January 1932 the Bureau reported that Christmas baskets had been delivered to over 30 families and over 300 children had received toys from Santa.

As noted, the ledgers provide the depth and breadth of the assistance throughout those seminal years of great need during the Depression. Food, shoes and clothes, medical and dental bills covered, rent for families with unemployed fathers, Christmas presents, blankets, linens, and household goods--and hope. The Scout noted in early 1932 that the "Welfare Bureau is one of the most active places in the City...and that many items were still badly needed." These reports of aid delivered and requests for additional support would continue regularly throughout the 1930s.

Other notable efforts were the way the various institutions and groups worked together to raise funds and stock the store. Numerous fundraiser



Welfare Association ledger book entry page, 1934

events including dances, dinners, and musical performances sponsored by the Women's Club, La Mesa Country Club, American Legion, and PTAs were key to covering costs and providing cash gifts. Other groups such as the Baptist Church ladies met regularly for sew-in events to mend donated clothes or make new blankets, comforters, or baby clothes.

Additionally, the La Mesa Welfare Bureau, and its leader Nan Coutts, were making an impression on other community welfare and charity efforts throughout the County. Over time the efficient organization and multi-partner service structure led to the institution being renamed as the La Mesa Welfare "Association." Mrs. Coutts, Mrs. Bailey, and Mrs. Condy were regularly being asked to speak to other organizations countywide on their operations. Both

the San Diego Community Chest and the County government's welfare program looked to the La Mesa Welfare Association as both a key partner and a model for implementing their own programs. Reports of regular deliveries of tons of Federal and State funded aid, food, and supplies to the Welfare Association for successful distribution were commonplace. By July 1933 the City Council had already honored the Welfare Association, recognizing its key role as a community asset for greater La Mesa.

Finding A Home for the Thrift Store - The City Steps Up

Subsequently finding a long-term home for the Welfare Bureau's store and storerooms was the initial goal to meet its community service mission. In October 1931 the Welfare Bureau had secured space for its store at the corner of Lookout (now La Mesa Blvd) and Third. The building's availability was the result of the Great Depression itself. The building, formerly the site of Mrs. Eva Parker's Candor Commission Corner New and Used Furniture store at 8347 Lookout, was empty. In July 1931 Mrs. Parker had quit the business and liquidated her stock due to the challenging economy. Mrs. Parker made the building available to the Bureau, although she continued to search for a long-term tenant, finally landing one by early 1933.

Subsequently the Welfare Association had to move their store operations to a new location. By Summer 1933 they obtained several rooms in the Heller Building, the then three-year old, two-story commercial building located on the southwest corner of Palm and Lookout. The Welfare Association used rooms in the prominent commercial structure for approximately three years. Although the

**CANDOR COMMISSION
CORNER**

8347 Lookout Ave.—La. Mesa

Quitting Business!!

Entire Stock Sacrificed!

POSITIVELY CLOSING OUT!
Entire Stock to be sold for what it will bring at a Public
Retail Sale!

**Furniture Going at Cost--Near
Cost and Less Than Cost**

SALE STARTS
Thursday, July 16th
9 A. M.

La Mesa Scout July 10, 1931

Thrift Shop's reputation and value had grown significantly, President Coutts recognized the costs of using expensive commercial space for the charity work. In addition, by early 1936 the La Mesa Welfare Association's success led to expansion of its area of influence west into San Diego's La Mesa Heights/Rolando area and farther east to Dehesa and Jamacha. In May 1936 they moved the Thrift Shop into larger, but temporary space in John Valleau's building at 8312 Lookout Avenue, next to the Bank of Southern California building (now Por Favor Restaurant). Although larger and considered to be an improvement over the Heller Building situation, this location did not last a year.



Furniture Store at far left of image. July 4, 1927, La Mesa History Center



Heller Building, c1940s, La Mesa History Center.

In March 1937 President Coutts was able to take advantage in the national funding reduction of the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal Work Progress Administration (WPA) programs to move the Thrift Shop into vacated WPA office space in City Hall, then located at 4749 Spring Street.

Mrs. Coutts had made a convincing argument to the City Council, including Mayor Benjamin Polak (whose wife Eulalie was an early Welfare Association officer) to obtain the space. Using her reputation, backed by the Association's successful track record, Coutts made the case that the Association was essentially undertaking necessary social services that were really the responsibility of the City. Noting the Association's additional roles, such as assisting the Police Department with helping to direct transient and vagrant single men traveling through town into State and County assistance programs, the Association was directly reducing the city's legal and social liabilities.

The Association's partnership with the City provided the catalyst for the finding of a permanent home for the now invaluable community service organization. In April 1939 the City Council announced that they had found

a location. They moved to foreclose on a tax delinquent lot near the corner of Nebo Drive and Orange Avenue. By May the City had secured the lot and Coutts



*City Hall, 4749 Spring Street, c1954.
La Mesa History Center.*

and the Welfare Association were in process of fund raising for construction of their building. Key funding to start design and permitting came from a \$700 bequest from late Association member Miss Sonia Thurman. In July the City approved the Association's building plans and in August 1939 ground was broken, and construction, overseen by contractor Charles Rapp (whose wife was an Association Board Member), had begun. Other carpenters and experienced local men provided their labor for free to defray costs for the Association. By late January 1940 the Association announced that the building would be ready soon and they would be vacating the City Hall space (freeing space for the recently expanded Police Department staff).

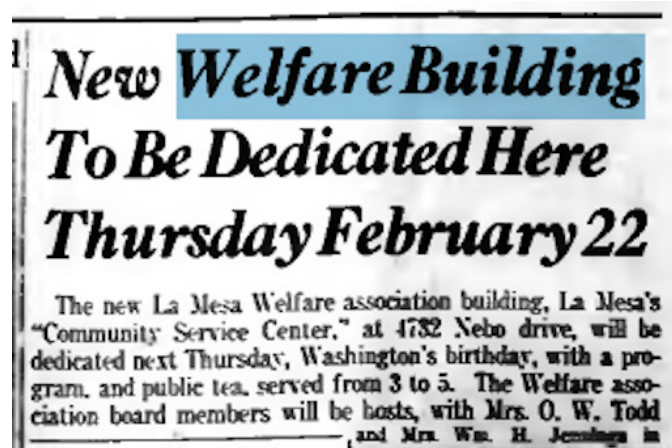
On February 22, 1940, the Welfare Association dedicated their new building,

initially dubbed their “Community Service Center.” The new building housed not only the Welfare Thrift Store but space for storage of supplies for distribution and sale, along with space for volunteers to process objects for sale. After nine years of providing community services, the City’s commitment had established the Welfare Association’s own brick-and-mortar home.

City Stands Up Again—and Again

The City and La Mesa Community continued to benefit from, and support the Welfare Association. Their focus changed as the Great Depression ended and the regional boom and growth during and after World War II changed the support services needed. Nan Couts would finally end her Presidency in 1950 but continued to be a guiding force in the Association’s success into the following decades. Another long-standing President, Mrs. Zoe Paulson, who served in the 1950s and 1960s, was also the store director. Subsequently, as La Mesa’s exponential Post-War Boom changed the service work to supporting not only the poor but other non-profits supporting youth and civic causes, the revenue produced through the Thrift Shop became even more essential.

Thus in 1964, President Paulson and the Association ladies were able to obtain the large lot directly north of their building that fronted on Orange Avenue. As Mrs. Paulson noted, the Association had outgrown the nearly 25-year-old, 25 x 45 foot building. In need of a larger building with better heating and air conditioning was essential for the Association meeting its needs. In March 1964 the Association had begun construction on its new home. On June 6, 1964 Mayor Ray Fellows dedicated the Community Welfare Association’s new Thrift Shop store at 8181 Orange Avenue. Founding Association members



La Mesa Scout February 16, 1940

along with Rev. John Daly of St. Martin’s Church and Rev. John W. Burger of the First Baptist Church attended along with key leaders of the American Legion Post.

Of course, with the City’s Post War suburban sprawl in full stride, Downtown Redevelopment efforts in the 1970s and 1980s were underway to help merchants compete with the retail power of the Grossmont Center Mall (opened 1961). Since the Welfare Association’s building was right in the center of those efforts, their relatively new, 15-year-old building was slated for removal in 1979. Both the City Council and its Redevelopment Agency, led by Ms. Pam Hamilton, all agreed that a new location for the Thrift Shop was non-negotiable.

What wasn’t so clear—was where to relocate it. Some suggested a location at La Mesa Blvd and Normal Street. Mayor Paul Fordem didn’t like that option and suggested moving it to MacArthur Park. That option had little support in the City or the public. Although the new La Mesa Downtown Merchants Association had concerns with potential for losing parking spots, in September 1979 the Council led by Vice Mayor George Bailey (Mayor Fordem was absent) and the Redevelopment Agency agreed to select a location in a City owned parking lot at the



Mayor Ray Fellows
dedicating
2nd Welfare
Association Building,
La Mesa Scout June
11, 1964.

SNIP-SNIP: Gangway!

Thrift Shop Opens At 8181 Orange Ave.



NEW PRESIDENT of the La Mesa Welfare Assn., Mrs. Ida R. Brunzman (right), accepts the gavel (above) from out-going president Mrs. Alfred Paulsen. Mrs. Paulsen will be director of the board. The local Welfare Assn. sponsors a Thrift Shop at 8181 Orange, La Mesa.

northwest corner of Third and Lemon Avenues. The City provided \$90,000 from the general fund to cover the cost of the new 2,500 square foot facility. This location became the Association's preferred site. Mrs. Paulson was reportedly very pleased with the decision and noted that since she had been the lead for the 1964 building, that the City had once again come through for its Welfare Association. Shortly thereafter the Association Board met with Ms. Hamilton and architect Ron Wiley to begin design on the new Thrift Store home. In January 1980 the Vista Pacific Construction Company was the project low bidder, although its bid was some \$19,000 over allocation.

Hamilton quickly requested an additional \$25,000 appropriation to ensure that the project would be completed. The Council agreed. On Memorial Day weekend 1980 the Association held another ribbon-cutting to dedicate its new Thrift Shop home. Mrs. Paulson and Rev. Burger were there once again, just as in 1964. The La Mesa Welfare Association still calls this building home today.

Our Welfare Association Ladies Outstanding History and Legacy

This article just covers the surface of the amazing legacy of the Welfare Association and its honor roll of dedicated La Mesa ladies, and their stories. All have made positive, long-standing enhancements for this community. Hopefully this story has illuminated the organization's origins, along with the unique vagabond history of its noteworthy and unique Thrift Store. Although many of these pioneering Welfare Bureau/Association pioneers deserve to have their stories told, I will only provide some biographical background on two of these essential community leaders.

Zoe Paulsen, long-serving Association president helped ensure both the 1964 and 1980 buildings, La Mesa Scout 1965.

City Approves Building New Thrift Shop

San Diego Union Staff Dispatches

LA MESA — The City Council has approved construction of the **La Mesa Thrift Shop** at 8340 Lemon Ave. The structure will replace the current shop at 8181 Orange Ave., which must be vacated to make way for the city's Phase II redevelopment program.

The current thrift shop property was bought by the city at the appraised value of \$87,926, Pam Hamilton, the city's redevelopment director, said during Tuesday night's council meeting. The lowest bid on the new structure was \$109,000, she said. She asked the council to appropriate \$25,000 from the city's unallocated reserve fund to cover the cost of the new building.

San Diego Union January 24, 1980

Mrs. Gertrude Bailey - and her front porch

Suzi Sterling had heard that the origins of the Welfare Association's Thrift Store had reportedly been started on one of the founder's front porches. Although the opening of the Welfare Bureau Store at Third and Lookout occurred immediately upon the organization's

founding in October 1931, Mrs. Gertrude Bailey did provide charity services from her, and her husband Le Roy Bailey's, Palm Avenue home.

Although I had seen Gertrude and her husband's name in various newspaper articles and archival collections here at the History Center, her being a founding member and early Vice President of the Welfare Association required me to look a little deeper into her story. Mrs. Bailey was the leader of La Mesa's American Legion Post Women's Auxiliary organization starting in the late 1920s. Le Roy was a WWI veteran. He had been wounded during his service on the front lines and had been given a veteran's pension. Le Roy and Gertrude Bailey had moved to La Mesa in 1923 from their native Ohio, both in their early 20s. They both became involved in the founding of the local American Legion Post in La Mesa. Both held leadership roles for many decades.

Gertrude's role in leading the Ladies Auxiliary efforts in charity and welfare support for veterans, their families and their children was renown. But not just in La Mesa. By the early 1930s Gertrude would be named to positions in both the California and U.S. American Legion auxiliary boards. Her leadership skills being recognized nationally.

And it is true that prior, and shortly afterward, to the establishment of the La Mesa Welfare Bureau, that newspaper articles noted that donations for American Legion Auxiliary welfare efforts could be dropped off, and charity baskets picked up for delivery, at her home at 4676 Palm Avenue. The house is long gone and now part of the First Methodist Church property. So, it appears that Gertrude's porch may have seen some activity that gave rise to La Mesa Welfare Association lore.



Gertrude Bailey,
La Mesa Scout
1930

The numerous articles found of her activities in promoting not only the community spirit and compassion of the La Mesa Welfare Association, but the city and community, during the Depression were not surprising. What was surprising was her relatively unknown role and positions in the state and county efforts to address relief and welfare work. During this period, she concurrently served in a leading position with the San Diego Community Chest as well as with the County Red Cross—her earliest community charity work activity, dating back to WWI.

By early 1934 Mrs. Coutts' organizational and leadership skills in welfare work had led the San Diego County office of the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) to hire her onto staff. SERA was the California state office charged with distributing Federal relief funds throughout the state. San Diego County's SERA (later State Relief Administration—SRA) leaders initially brought Nan on to address specific case work, then later as chief case supervisor. This led to her taking on larger roles in program development and by 1938 to her civil service position as Assistant to the SRA County Director.

The County Director positions were appointed by the Governor's office. In early 1939, after the election of Democrat Culbert Olsen as governor in November 1938, the first Democratic governor since 1895, many previous appointees, such as County SRA Director Edgar Hastings, a former County Supervisor and Republican party member, were dismissed or resigned. Thusly, on January 2, 1939, the state SRA Administrator Harold Pomeroy appointed Mrs. Nan Coutts to the acting SRA Director for San Diego County. This placed Nan Coutts in charge of one of the most powerful local agencies, and likely the highest ranking female civil

Nan Coutts' Unknown Public Civil Service Legacy

For anyone who has read or written on La Mesa's history in the last century, Sarah "Nan" Coutts is often considered the leading lady of La Mesa. Those in the know are aware of her establishment of the Welfare Association, or perhaps her efforts to build the girls cottage in MacArthur Park—which was named for her at its completion in 1957. When I wrote the history of the Grossmont Hospital District book, it was no surprise that the male-dominated business and civic leaders of the day turned to Mrs. Coutts as the sole female representative. Her assignment to help the campaigns to form the Hospital District and its Women's Auxiliary in the early 1950s being the likely reason for her leaving the Welfare Association presidency in 1950 (read about her significant role in *Grossmont Hospital: A Legacy of Community Service*, available from our bookstore).

servant regionally. Nan being in charge of overseeing some 200 employees in relief and welfare work countywide.

Although new state SRA Director Dr. Dewey Anderson showed support for the interim SRA Director in his first visit to San Diego in mid-January, the selection of the permanent SRA Director appointment triggered a political firestorm in majority Republican San Diego County. First, State Senator Ed Fletcher moved to get Hastings reinstated. That failed. Then the local Democratic Party was flooded with numerous local party candidates over

the next few months for this important County position. Finally in September 1939 the SRA appointed Democrat William B. Roe to the County Director position. This ended Mrs. Coutts eight month acting SRA Director position. She would retire from the SRA in early 1940.

The reasoning for Coutts' sudden retirement was later revealed. William Roe's initial tenure was fraught with political intrigue and concern. In March 1940 at a contentious Joint Senate-Assembly public hearing held in San Diego, Mrs. Coutts' was one of three witnesses along with Director Roe, to testify. She noted that shortly after Roe's appointment she was demoted twice. First to frontline supervisor and then to individual case worker. Roe's testimony indicated that he was less interested in relief being "social work" and more in line with unemployment benefits, thus decreasing the role of case work and aid distribution in general. It is likely that this clear change in relief work philosophy, her demotions, and the political intrigue led to Nan Coutts' exit from civil service--and perhaps her rarely bringing the subject up in later interviews.



*Nan Coutts,
San Diego Union
January 4, 1939*



Acting SRA Director Nan Coutts meets with State administrator, San Diego Union January 15, 1939.

Luckily for San Diegans, Nan Coutts would un-retire, taking up a new position with the local Red Cross chapter. She had been working with both the Welfare Association and local Red Cross when the U.S. entered WWII in December 1941. She quickly organized La Mesa's Home Service Corps to address wartime community needs. In November 1942 the San Diego County Chapter of the Red Cross hired Nan to their Home Service Corps staff, becoming Director in January 1943. Nan would serve admirably as Home Corps Director until her second retirement in August 1947 at age 56.

This appears to be just in time to be engaged with the Grossmont Hospital District campaign. She also served several terms on both the City of La Mesa Recreation Commission (now Community Services Commission) and Police Commissions throughout the 1950s. With an unprecedented lifetime of regional community service, Nan Coutts passed away peacefully in 1985 at the age of 96.

Conclusion

The La Mesa Welfare Association is one of those paramount stories of La Mesa community spirit and initiative. Still functioning as a productive non-profit corporation in the support of community institutions and their causes, the Welfare Association's story also reveals much about some historically significant individuals and their impact to so many La Mesans over the years—as well as a successful Thrift Store. But as this short history hopefully provides, it also allows us to illuminate on the stories of just a few, of the many individuals and institutions who have made a positive and lasting impact on our community.

*Jim Newland, Past President
La Mesa History Center*

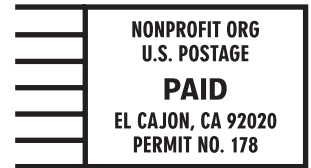


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The La Mesa History Center is an all-volunteer non-profit 501c3 corporation charged with preserving the history of the greater La Mesa area. The La Mesa History Center operates the Rev. Henry A. McKinney House, a 1908 House Museum and the History Center Archives Research Facility located at 8369 University Avenue in La Mesa, California.

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Submit contributions via email, or email the Editor at info@lamesahistory.com