

Fall 2023

lookout avenue

LA MESA
History Center

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The NEWSLETTER of the LA MESA HISTORY CENTER

VOLUME 48, #3

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Home Tour scheduled for 2nd Saturday in November

The summer has flown by at the La Mesa History Center and fall is upon us which means one thing: the Annual Home Tour! The Home Tour committee is busy finalizing the route, updating the website with ticket and event information, and making sure that important elements like buses and docents are all in place for the November 11th event. Scheduling conflicts pushed the tour back to the 2nd Saturday in November, but with the September and October Meet Me at the McKinney House events also falling on the 2nd Saturday, the change means that when you think "2nd Saturday" this fall, then think "La Mesa History Center events!" Check out the Fall Events page in this newsletter or the LMHC website for all the details on the upcoming activities.

A Summer of Outreach

Looking back on the summer, the LMHC participated in several community outreach engagements. Many thanks to Gary and Terri Carty for driving their '29 Pontiac Chief on behalf of the LMHC in the June 3rd Flag Day parade.



Past President Jim Newland entertained and educated the Grossmont-Mt. Helix Improvement Association (GMIA) membership with an overview of the history of Mt. Helix at their annual meeting on June 25th.



The La Mesa Village Association provided the LMHC with a second opportunity to staff a table at the Friday Farmers' Market on August 11th. We also had another opportunity for outreach at the October 13th Market as well - just in time to promote the Home Tour!

Also, the Mt. Helix Park Foundation furnished us two tables at their annual Food and Wine Festival on August 19th. All of these events provide us with the opportunity to engage with the greater La Mesa Community and interact with people who may not be able to stop by the McKinney House or the Archival Research Room on Saturday afternoons.



Welcome to New Board Members

A note of welcome to the new Board members who joined the LMHC Board following the election on June 25th at the Annual Meeting. We are very excited to have Steven Christiansen rejoining the Board as Membership Vice President, Spencer and Stephanie Peters joining as Co-Treasurers, and Dianne McCann and Brenna Peirson joining as Members-at-Large. In just a couple months their impact is already being felt as we ramp up new ways to communicate with the membership, a more holistic plan for maintenance of the McKinney House and grounds, and exciting new events and exhibits.



Veronica Martzahl, President La Mesa History Center

**SAVE THE DATE!
ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH
2:00PM TO 4PM
McKinney House**

*Photos at Left: Donna Bloomer and Sam Alberts
staff the History Center booth at Mt. Helix Park's
Fundraiser*

Fall 2023 Events at the La Mesa History Center

Meet Me at the McKinney House – *Lost California* Event

Saturday, October 14, 2023

Exhibit – 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Speaker – 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Learn about the latest Acadia Press Postcard Series book, *Lost California*, from its author, Erik Beck and view an exhibit of lost buildings from the La Mesa History Center collections.

Lost California contains postcards that reflect a hidden past of California that now only exists on the page and are part of the John and Jane Adams Collection of the San Diego State University Special Collections and Archives.

Halloween Event in conjunction with Trick-or-Treating in La Mesa Village

Tuesday, October 31, 2023

4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

La Mesa History Center partner, the La Mesa Village Association, will host its 5th Annual Halloween trick-or-treating event. Once you've filled your treat bag, head over to the McKinney House yard for fall themed crafts and activities.

17th Annual Home Tour – Preservation Heroes

Saturday, November 11, 2023

9:00 am to 3:00 pm

Join the La Mesa History Center for their annual home tour event. Hop on and off the provided tour bus to walk through and learn about the incredible architecture and design incorporated into the homes of our greater La Mesa area neighbors. See the La Mesa History Center website for more details and ticket information.

SITE RENOVATION UPDATE

The McKinney house property looks quite different than it did in 2018 when we started working on plans for a site renovation. At that time the property had a grassy base, a modest memorial rose garden along the east side fence which was made of white vinyl, a 100-year-old pine tree that was fighting to stay alive, an arbor in the middle of the yard on the south side of the house and beautiful lemon trees. The Board of Directors knew it was time to discuss an update, initially motivated by the dying pine tree, so a committee was formed to look at the needs of what was then the La Mesa Historical Society and how the site helped meet those needs.

After several months of discussion, and input from Society members, it became clear that many wanted to see more programming on site as well as a return to the original “ranch” feel of the property’s interpretive period. To that end the grass and arbor were removed and decomposed granite (DG) was installed opening up the entire site for hosting more people at events. The DG also was more cost effective cutting down on the water bill and it echoed what the site would have looked like during its early 1900s interpretive period allowing us to meet several goals at once.

The next step was to address the dying pine tree. Many hearts were broken when it was finally died, was removed and a new tree planted. After one false start (the initial tree died!) a second tree was planted and has taken root. Wood from the original pine tree was saved and made into a stunning bench by local artist Brian Pederson. It is installed next to the house overlooking the existing tree.

Next up was tearing down the vinyl fence and fencing the entire property in a style that was keeping with the interpretive period. We also moved and expand the memorial rose garden to the front of the house where pedestrians

could enjoy its beauty. As part of that, Kew Garden roses, that give a nod to the Cherokee roses that once lined University Avenue, were planted along the street side of the fence. These small-thorned white roses are a safer choice for pedestrians. The rose garden itself got an upgrade with lovely, fragrant roses that are the delight of the neighbors. It also has a small bench for visitors to enjoy the garden.

The monument sign, complete with the updated History Center logo, was next up and has finally been installed. Although it took a great deal of time due to permit issues, it was worth the wait.



Currently we are working on 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 is helping with the design and permits for those to projects. We are hoping to have the ramada through the city permit process by the end of 2023.

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 healthy, producing trees. Preliminary art work on that has been done and it is outstanding.

The site has been used for *Meet Me at the McKinney House* events as well as the summer annual meeting and December holiday party. Although COVID hit right in the middle of the renovation, so events took a long pause, we are working toward adding more appropriate events to the site as time goes on. So far the space has worked as hoped. It is more flat and allows for events to flow around three sides of the McKinney house.

Vice President Tracey Stotz, who is chairing the project said, “We could not have done any of this if not for the community support we have received. We are so appreciative!”

If you would like to donate to the renovation 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. We are on the home stretch. Help us wrap up the renovation and focus on enjoying the site.





**La Mesa History Center
Home Tour History Roundtable Presentation**

“Preservation Heroes”

*The History, Art & Architecture of Mt. Nebo,
Boulder Heights, and Porter Hill*

Saturday October 28, 2023

10am to 12 noon

La Mesa Dale School

Auditorium

4370 Parks Avenue, La Mesa



LINES TO LA MESA

If you'd find a quiet haven far from
 stream and stress of life,
 Where sweet peace and love abideth
 and no thought of restless strife,
 Seek La Mesa, luscious suburb, San
 Diego's child, alone
 Nestled in among the foothills, near
 the vale of El Cajon.

Where the lofty Cuyamaca as on
 sunset duty stand
 guarding o'er the cozy dwellings,
 fairest picture in the land,
 When the sun in dying splendor sheds
 its glory everywhere,
 Tinting all with radiant beauty, hap-
 py homes and gardens rare.

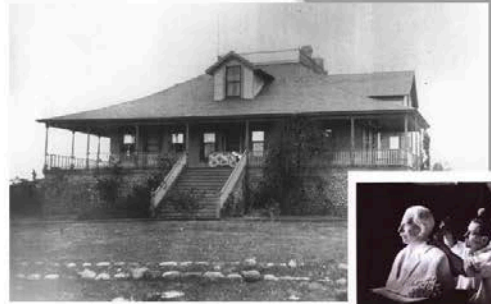
There the peak of Crossmont rieth
 dark against the azure sky,
 And the stately head of Helix with
 the Jambucha close by,
 Looking westward in the distance
 dimly seen the ocean blue
 With the wondrous mother city lying
 plainly in the view.

Where the birds all wish to tarry far
 from gale and tempest's roar
 And are evermore returning when
 their wanderings are o'er,
 Where the flowers are always bloom-
 ing 'neath the California sun,
 You would love this little city and
 its people, every one.
 —Mary D. Garfield.

Presenter:

James Newland: *historian & author*
“Images of America: La Mesa”

**Roundtable Admission: Free for LMHS Members;
 \$5 donation for non-members**



**CATHOLICS OF
LA MESA START
NEW CHURCH**
 Building Work at Mount Nebo, Chapel Lane
 Starting Sunday and Parks Street
 Section, La Mesa.

A meeting was held in Mount Nebo
 La Mesa, on Monday evening when
 was attended by many members of the
 Catholic church and other interest-
 ed. An organization was effected and
 they will begin with the soil in work
 at Mount Nebo in La Mesa in new Cath-
 olic parish with a building given.
 The new parish will include La Ma-
 sa, Crossmont, La Mesa Heights,
 Lower Center and Spring Valley.



Residence of O. W. Todd, Mount Nebo

**LOOKOUT PARK IS
MOUNTAIN VIEW-POINT**

**Located Only A Few Hundred
 Feet Above Business Center
 of The City**

Mount Nebo, about 10 miles west
 of San Diego, on whose rocky slopes
 the Lookout Park overlooks as fair
 a vista as ever old Mount Nebo of
 old. From its base flow the famous
 springs, even called La Mesa Springs,
 and the country-side and railway sta-
 tion there are but a few miles. The
 mountain has been enlarged, some-
 times graded, elevated and plant-
 ed in shade and ornamental trees. No
 more in the west can meet a larger
 percentage of growth during the past
 three years, and progress has only be-
 gun.

17TH ANNUAL LA MESA HISTORY CENTER HOME TOUR “PRESERVATION HEROES” Featuring Downtown’s La Mesa Historic Neighborhoods of Mt Nebo, Boulder Heights & Porter Hill Saturday November 11th 9am-3pm

The La Mesa History Center Home Tour enters its 17th year—re-earning its well-deserved reputation as one of the most popular and welcoming home tours in the county. This year our in-person home tour returns to the hills surrounding downtown La Mesa, the Jewel of the Hills. Our tour will feature an eclectic mixture of Folk Victorian, Craftsman, Prairie Style, Spanish Eclectic and Colonial Revival designs emblematic of these historic neighborhoods. The Society’s last tour here in 2018 was an overwhelming success. This year promises to be another outstanding event highlighting these historic neighborhoods, their distinctive properties along with the significant designers, builders, artists/artisans, and historically significant residents and families featured at these landmark homes. It will also let us honor our present “Preservation Hero” owners who continue to preserve and steward these landmark properties.

This year’s History Center’s tour also features another significant and long-standing local institution that has recently celebrated its own centennial, St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church. St. Martin’s will be our Tour Shuttle Stop and parking location for tour guests (7710

El Cajon Blvd). In addition, St. Martin’s will have its original, and renovated, original 1921 church building (painstakingly moved to the site in 1948) and the 1965 Arthur Decker designed Modern-style church with beautiful murals, stained-glass windows and statuary open for Tour Guests to visit.

Historic Community Hero Homes

The preservation of each of the featured tour properties also highlights the history of some of the most prominent and fascinating families, individuals, and long-standing institutions in La Mesa history.



Porter House, 1893.



Porter House, 1893.



Todd House, 1912.

These include the **1893 Porter House**, pioneer citrus ranch house and home for over a century to the influential civic and community leading Porter Family, including the “preserved-in-time” art studio of noted sculptor James Tank Porter; the **1912 Todd House**, a cutting-edge Prairie Style home associated with the family who helped found the annual Easter Sunrise services tradition at Mt. Nebo’s Prospect Park; the **c1910/29 Packard Home**, the house of noted publisher Phineas Packard and one-time home to his daughter, renown local Modern artist/artisan Ellamae Packard Woolley. The property now features eclectically theme-furnished rooms with notable antiques, artifacts and art of Woolley, Olaf Wieghorst, Robert Vavra, Robert Miles Parker, and Broadway designer Gregg Barnes; the **c1910 Lyster/Garfield House**, the

beautiful Craftsman home of Wade and Mary Garfield—Mary the artist and poet whose prose lead to La Mesa’s “Jewel of the Hills” nickname; a distinctive and art-integrated home and grounds of the **1938 James and Corrine Dall Spanish Eclectic House**; and the aforementioned Mission Style-influenced **1921 and 1965 St. Martin’s Churches**.

Current Preservation Owner Heroes

These special homes also provide us an opportunity to thank the current owners who heroically steward their preservation today. All tastefully and compatibly period furnished, artistically decorated, and wonderfully landscaped, they continue to provide the current homeowners the same functions, and assets that the original owners experienced for these many generations.



Interior, Lyster-Garfield House, c1910.

St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church, A Century of Blessings

Similar, to last year’s Shuttle Center at Grossmont High School, this year’s host site, St. Martin’s Catholic Church, has also served as a vital community asset for over 100 years.

St. Martin’s was a direct response to the East County’s Catholic community growth concurrent with the young cities of La Mesa and El Cajon in the 1910s. During this period the Diocese would often send out San Diego parish priests to the El Cajon and La Mesa areas to officiate weddings and other special services, but most

Catholics had to travel to San Diego Catholic churches for regular services.

Although the smaller El Cajon parish church was dedicated in November 1919, it was not until November 1920 that the larger La Mesa and Lemon Grove Catholic community moved formally to establish a parish church in La Mesa.



*La Mesa Scout
November 19,
1920.*

On Monday evening November 15, 1920, a meeting was held at Stokes Mortuary chapel room (the building still stands at 8360 La Mesa Blvd) to establish a new parish under the direction of Fr. Carroll, who had been sent from the Diocese in Los Angeles. The *La Mesa Scout* reported that the new parish was to include La Mesa, Grossmont, La Mesa Heights, Lemon Grove, and Spring Valley. On Sunday November 21, 1920, the first mass was held at Stokes Chapel. Owner Edward Stokes offered his chapel until a proper church could be built for the new parish, which was to be known as Our Lady of Mercy.

In March 1921 the *Scout* reported on a possible acquisition on La Mesa Blvd near Sheldon's Service Station, but the deal fell through and in June it was announced that a new site near the corner of Lookout Ave (now La Mesa Blvd) and Normal Street had been donated.

But the most significant announcement came in the October 7, 1921 *Scout* when a \$5,000 matching-grant from an anonymous donor in Los Angeles initiated immediate construction of the new church..



*La Mesa
Scout
October 7,
1921.*

Three weeks later Fr. Michael McCormack, who had been assigned to the new parish from Sacred Heart in East San Diego, announced plans for the church building had been approved

and that the local community was chipping in for the matching funds. Community-based church events and other fund raisers were held to ensure the matching funds would be available to complete the new church.

On November 14, 1921 Right Reverend John J. Cantwell, Bishop of the Monterey and Los Angeles diocese, and other high ranking church officials oversaw the laying of the cornerstone for La Mesa's new Catholic church. A parish house for the Father as well as the 46x80 foot church building were to be constructed as soon as possible. It was designed for a capacity of 300 with a sanctuary, vestibule, and choir loft. At the Cornerstone celebration Fr. McCormack thanked the Diocese, and the community, for the accomplishment almost to the day of the one-year anniversary of the parish. Also present was Mrs. Mary I. Cavano of Los Angeles, who had agreed to drop her anonymity, and receive credit for her generous donation.

Contractor James V. Roche of Los Angeles oversaw the design and construction. Two weeks later the *Scout* reported a large crew at work with "splendid progress" on the church and parish house. On December 23, 1921, the *Scout* reported that the first service would be held on Christmas 1921. Although the Church was not fully completed, temporary furnishings and a small organ would be ready for the Christmas mass.

Fr. McCormack reported on the first Christmas service in the next *Scout*, remarking that the congregation attended in-spite-of one of the worst rainstorms in recent memory. Temporary draping, hundreds of folding chairs, as well as a temporary alter loaned, and trucked over, by the local Episcopalian Church, and decorated by founding parishioner Mrs. Florence O'Connor shone through the storms. Fr. McCormack noting that the tower bells rang out for the first time for what he described as a wondrous day to be "long remembered in the Catholic annals of the city."

Roche finished work on the church and parish rectory house in Spring 1922. Its original wood

shingle siding and interior wainscotting being considered distinctive elements of the Mission-Revival influenced structure.



St. Martin's Parish House & Church, c1922.

Although Fr. McCormack would leave for health reasons later in 1922, Father George Siebert would succeed him and continue the church's growth. In 1925 Fr. Joseph Mesny would take over the renamed St. Martin's parish and lead it for over a decade.

St. Martin's continued to grow with the La Mesa community. In 1948 St. Martin's purchased a much larger property at the junction of La Mesa Blvd and El Cajon Blvd (then still US 80) to address their exponentially growing congregation. Subsequently they worked with skilled building movers in-order-to move their beloved original wood-frame church building to the new site. This six-month long project was finished in time, as planned, for Christmas Mass 1948. The Church was slightly remodeled with new stucco façade and modernized bell tower.

The new site also allowed St. Martin's the room for a larger rectory and completion of a long-desired parish school, which opened on the site in 1952. In 1965 St. Martin's opened its larger, Modern style church, designed by El Cajon architect Arthur Decker and built by La Mesa contractors Riha Construction. Fr. Dennis Barry led the parish through this Post-War expansion period, and the original church was renamed Barry Hall in his honor.



*Moving St Martins 1948.
Image courtesy St. Martin's Church.*

Guests. They will also have some exhibits and docents familiar with St. Martin's history. For more on the history of St. Martin's including home movies of the 1948 building move and interviews with parishioners see their website history page:
<http://stmartinoftoursparish.org/a-century-of-blessings/>

Pioneering Citrus Landscape Gem & Community-Focused Family

For the first time our La Mesa History Center Home Tour features one of our 19th century landmark properties, a property dating to our early citrus ranching roots.

La Mesa Colony to Porter Hill

Today's La Mesa can trace its community roots back to the days of Southern California's Great Boom of the 1880s. One of the key components of San Diego's development during this period was Theodore Van Dyke's San Diego Flume Company. Established in 1885, just as the boom began to hit San Diego County, the Flume Company built an elaborate system of miles of wooden flumes, trestles, tunnels and holding reservoirs to bring the water of the Cuyamaca Mountains down to the coastal lands. Van Dyke and his investors realizing that water was the key to developing San Diego's hinterlands into successful citrus ranches as was already established in the Los Angeles region.



St. Martin's Barry Hall, c1980.

Barry Hall Featured on Tour

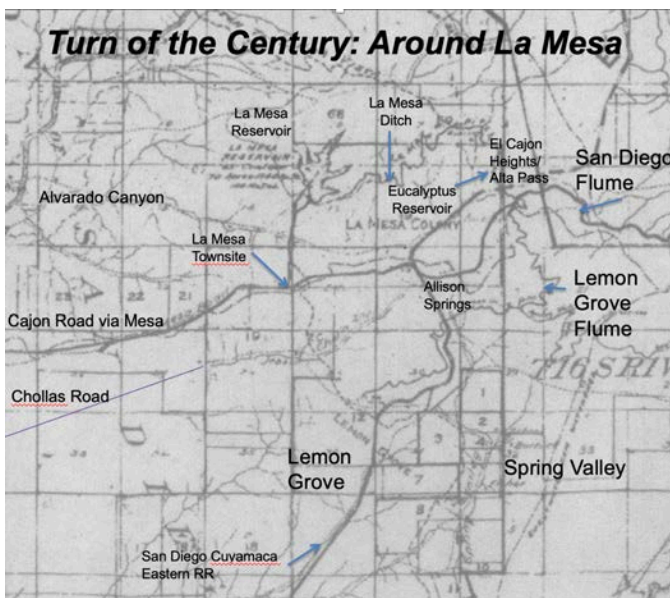
Our tour partners at St. Martins will have Barry Hall and the 1965 church open for Tour



The Flume Company subsequently purchased some 4,000 acres (most of which is now North La Mesa and part of the College Area). They subdivided the property into mostly 5 and 10 acre lots for citrus ranches as well as platted the townsite for La Mesa along the Cajon Road, centered at today's corner of 70th and El Cajon Blvd.



The townsite being south of their largest reservoir site (today's Lake Murray, the original La Mesa Reservoir completed in 1895). The Flume was completed into its original holding reservoir at what is today Briercrest Park in 1889. Also completed in Spring 1889 was Governor Robert Whitney Waterman's San Diego, Cuyamaca and Eastern Railroad. However, this important transportation route (today's MTDB Trolley line) did not travel through the Colony's townsite, but



to the east through cattleman Robert Allison's property—known as Allison's Springs due to the natural springs on his land in today's Collier Park.

Although the Great Boom had went bust by 1889, by 1891 settlers at both La Mesa Townsite and Allison Springs began to build small rural farming communities. The La Mesa School and Church at the townsite by 1891, and in 1895 the Allison School at the corner of Orange and Date Avenues in the renamed La Mesa Springs.

Civil War Veteran and Cattle King Henry Roach Buys Into La Mesa Colony

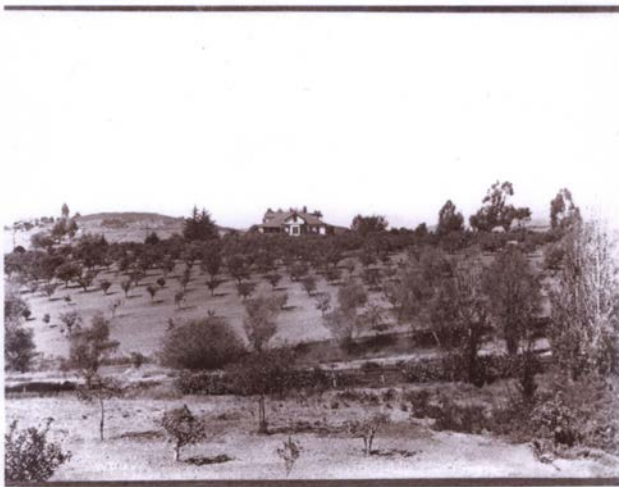
Although growth in 1890s San Diego County was relatively slow during the Post-Boom period, many fascinating individuals continued to find the area attractive. One of those was English immigrant Henry Roach. Roach and his parents had settled in Michigan in the 1850s when he was just a boy. In 1862, at age 17 Henry enlisted in the Union Army, serving in the 5th Michigan regiment for three years. Finding the Army life to his liking, he re-enlisted and was sent to Texas with the Cavalry. While in Texas he married Union Army Captain James Fisk's daughter Sarah. Henry and Sarah would have two children. Roach also successfully invested in cattle ranching and mercantile businesses in their home in Bracketville, Texas, near San Antonio. His business success soon had him buying property and investing in banks and other business pursuits.

Roach apparently began visiting San Diego during the Boom, and local newspapers began to report on the Texas "Cattle King" visiting and investing in San Diego and southern California. Henry and Susan apparently preferring to spend their summers in the pleasant climate of San Diego over Texas. Roach also invested in local banks and businesses, joined the influential Cuyamaca Club, and served on the committee for the City's first Cabrillo Festival in 1892. He also purchased several properties—including Lots 74 and 79 of La Mesa Colony, across the road from La Mesa Springs developer and La Mesa Lemon Company owner Andrew

Crowder's Lookout Ranch property.

Roach made that purchase of nearly 20 acres in January 1892 for \$1,300. In the May 28, 1892 *El Cajon Valley News* it was reported that Roach was planting his property in citrus. By 1893, Roach had a ranch house constructed. It is speculated that pioneering San Diego architect John B. Stannard may have designed this home for Roach. That speculation comes from a January 1, 1892 *San Diego Union* newspaper article that noted that Roach had hired Stannard to design a \$3,000 home for him in Texas around the same time.

This home is one of the few 19th century homes remaining in the La Mesa area. This Folk Victorian style two story with lower level features a full wraparound veranda porch, high stone foundation and hipped roof and is reminiscent of typical French Colonial influenced homes of similar period houses in Louisiana and Texas.



Roach House and citrus ranch, c1900.

It appears unlikely that Henry and Sarah Fisk Roach spent much time at the ranch, hiring ranch caretakers to run the property. This is especially the case as Sarah "purchased" the property from Henry in 1895 for \$5,500. The 1897 Directory featuring the only reference to Mrs. Roach as a resident during this period. The "sale" may have actually been part of the

settlement of Henry and Sarah's recent divorce. Interestingly, Henry married Pennsylvania native Viola M. Neill, whom he met in San Diego, a year later in June 1896. Local newspapers continued to note that Henry and the new Mrs. Roach spent much time in San Diego.

Roach's life took a significant turn at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898. The veteran's patriotic zeal led him to request a commission from Governor Pingree of Michigan. Roach received the position of regimental quartermaster of the 34th Michigan Regiment, with the rank of Captain, and traveled with the troops to Cuba. He and his regiment participated in several engagements and Henry's leadership was recognized. He was promoted to Major and assigned as adjutant on General Henry Ware Lawton's staff. Unfortunately, the 53-year-old Henry fell victim to the largest cause of casualty in the Spanish-American War--disease. He contracted Malaria, was discharged, and returned to Texas in December 1898. Although Roach and Viola returned several times to San Diego, he never regained his health, and on July 24, 1902, Henry Roach died in San Diego at the age of 57.

Sarah Fisk Roach had apparently moved to Chicago around the turn-of-the-century, but then relocated a few years later to San Antonio, Texas to be near to her children. However, in 1899 she had taken out a mortgage on her La Mesa Springs ranch property. In 1904 San Diego mortgage holder George J. Chambers filed suit to recover the unpaid loan as well as the compound interest. On August 19, 1904, a judgement resulted in the court ordered sale of the property of which Chambers obtained partial title. That same year Sarah Roach had rented the property to Dr. Henry D. Porter and his family. On September 19, 1905, Sarah Fisk Roach and George Chambers sold the property Dr. Porter.

The Porters: Wisconsin to China to La Mesa Springs

Dr. Henry D. Porter was a Wisconsin native and graduate of Beloit College, the Andover

Seminary, and Northwestern University medical school. In 1872 he went to China on missionary work. After returning to marry Elizabeth Chapin in April 1879 he and Elizabeth returned to China where their three sons Lucius, Chappell and James Tank Porter were born. Dr. Porter served in a village 250 miles south of Peking (now Beijing), helping establish a hospital, church and boys school. Around 1900, at the time of the Boxer Rebellion in China, the Porters returned to the United States, purchasing the Roach property. As such, the Porters named their new home Ping Ah Shan, or "Hill of Peace" in reference to their time in China.



Siblings Henry, Elizabeth and Edwards Porter, c1910.

Although Henry's health was failing, he continued to be interested in church work and the growing La Mesa Springs community. He and Elizabeth were leaders in building up La Mesa's Central Congregational Church. Henry died in 1916 at the age of 71. In the meantime, his brother Edwards Porter and sister Mary Porter had purchased the adjacent ranch of Col. James Randlett. Randlett, another Civil War veteran, and acquaintance of Henry Roach, had purchased the lot to the east and built a home in 1896. The home nicknamed "Rosehedge," for the row of Cherokee roses planted along the Cajon Road (now La Mesa Blvd), served as the home for Edwards and Mary for the next twenty years. This led to the area north of the road being renamed Porter Hill.



Mary Porter at Rosehedge home, c1910s.

James Tank Porter: Artist and Civic Leader

Elizabeth Porter continued to live at Ping Ah Shan, but it would be her youngest son, James Tank Porter, who would make a long-standing mark on La Mesa. James had initially entered Beloit College but returned after an unfortunate injury playing football led to the loss of a foot. While recuperating at his parents La Mesa home, he grew interest in design, aviation, invention, and art. He enrolled at Pomona College in 1910 earning a degree in Art and Music before entering the Beaux Arts School at Columbia University in New York City. Porter received acclaim for his award-winning sculpture work. Shortly after World War I he returned to California. In 1923 James married Lenore Branam. They settled in with his widowed mother Elizabeth at the family's La Mesa home. Daughter Anne Porter arrived in 1924.

James continued his art, opening a foundry in La Mesa after receiving training in bronze casting at the Santa Barbara School for the Arts (the building now part of El Presidio State Historic Park). He is well known nationally for his work and was a significant member of San Diego's art community. James was the founding President of the Contemporary Artists of San Diego (formed in 1929) and President of the San Diego Art Guild in the 1930s. He also helped form the Foothills Art Association. His work was exhibited throughout the country.



James Tank Porter, c1930s.

Porter also helped establish in 1927 and, served for 13 years, on the City of La Mesa's Planning Commission. This just being one of the Porter family's long record of civic service. Uncle Edwards Porter serving as President of the City Trustees (de - facto mayor) from 1920 to 1924. In 1930 the Porters donated the land and paid for the design and construction of the first dedicated City library building (Porter Hall). In 1965 the City moved Porter Hall across the street into MacArthur Park to make room for the new Senior-Adult Center building. The Chinese-influenced Porter Hall is now a City Landmark and home of the Foothills Art Association gallery.



Porter Hall Library on original site, c1930s.

MacArthur Park is also on former Porter family land that was sold to the City shortly after WWII.

James Tank Porter passed away in 1962, wife Lenore in 1980. Daughter Anne Porter Hall lived at the house into this century, including when the Roach Porter House was listed on the City Historical Register. Anne's family continued to own the house, although most of the former ranch property was sold off and subdivided into today's Porter Hill neighborhood.

In 2022 the Porter great-grandchildren put the property up for sale after 117 years of ownership. Luckily long-standing neighborhood residents purchased the property. These La Mesa Preservation Heroes provide us all the opportunity of visiting this amazing piece of La Mesa's architectural and community history. Don't miss the chance to visit not only the home, but James Tank Porters' "preserved in time" workshop.



James Tank Porter studio.

Boulder Heights Suburban Origins and the Jewel of an Artist

Shortly after the Porters moved to La Mesa Springs, the suburban development of the community began. Developers such as David Collier and the Park-Grable Company started purchasing old citrus ranch properties around La Mesa Springs and subdivided them into smaller home lots around the business district developing along Lookout Avenue (now La Mesa Blvd). Downtown La Mesa Springs, centered on the railroad, was picturesquely ringed by a series of small hills. On the east end is part of the former Lookout Ranch that is known as Boulder Heights due to the granite that was quarried on both its north and south slopes.

One of those interested in the burgeoning suburban community was Benjamin Lyster. Lyster arrived in La Mesa Springs from his native Canada around 1906. He brought not only his wife Flossie, and his three young daughters, but his father Philip and sister Lily Lyster. Ben quickly obtained a position with the Park-Grable Company and also purchased many lots with which to speculate and develop. His father Philip, although listed as retired, also joined in to support and promote the growing community. It was reported that Philip had provided the new *La Mesa Scout* newspaper with its first printing press upon its establishment in 1907.

One of the lots Ben purchased was for his father to build a home. Originally part of the Parks Addition, the large hilltop view lot east of downtown would eventually be incorporated as part of several subsequent subdivisions including the Upland Tract, Colliers Addition and eventually Boulder Heights. Per historic photos and other sources, it appears that Philip Lyster built the two-story Craftsman style house in late 1910. Two years later Benjamin Lyster would build his own home across the street. Both houses being built before the existing streets that they now front were graded or paved. Philip died in January 1915 and Ben's family lived in their home until 1920. San Diegan Della Spear purchased Philip's home as one her many investments and rented it out.

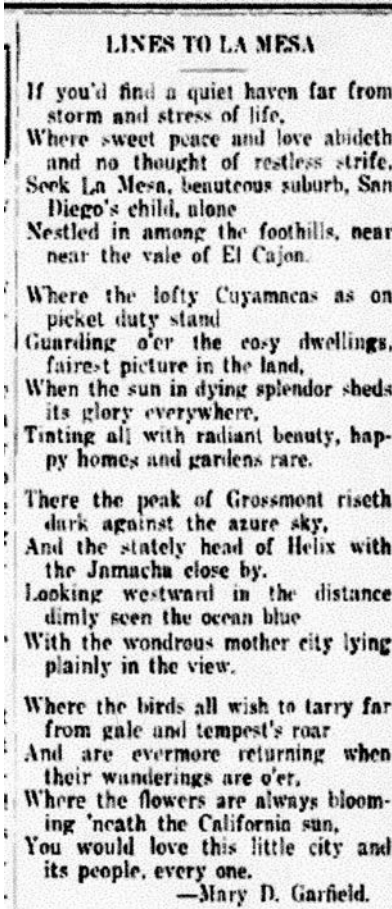


Crop of 1912 photo showing Philip (top middle-left) and Ben (top middle-right) Lyster homes on Boulder Heights.

Wade and Mary Garfield Make their Contributions for La Mesa

In October 1918 the *Scout* reported that attorney Wade Garfield and family had rented the Lyster House for the Winter. Wade was a well-known San Diego attorney and he and wife Mary, and their five, and eventually seven, children found the beautiful Craftsman house on the hill to be a worthy home. Wade quickly became involved in the community, becoming a key member of the Chamber of Commerce, other service clubs and the Congregational Church. Mary as well joined in becoming an active member of the La Mesa Women's Club. Mary was a trained artist of the Plein Air style and quickly became a valued member of local social and civic organizations.

Within a year Wade and Mary appeared to be fully engaged community contributors and leaders, as were their children in the local La Mesa Grammar School and soon-to-be formed Grossmont High School. It was in December 1919 that Mary published a poetic ode to their new hometown titled "Lines to La Mesa." Over the next few years, including the birth of seventh child, James Garfield (Wade was a distant relative to the former President James Garfield), the Garfields continued to participate and serve in the civic, business, and social circles of La Mesa. Thus a few years later they paid for the printing of 1,000 copies of Mary's poem to be sold to help the Women's Club pay off the mortgage of the original 1913 clubhouse down the street at Third and Lemon.



*Lines to La Mesa,
La Mesa Scout
December 20, 1919.*

In 1925 the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce took Mary Garfield's poem, retitling it "Jewel of the Hills," making it the new moniker for the City. A motto the City of La Mesa still uses today.

In 1921 the Garfields formally purchased the home from Della Spear. The family would continue to own the home into the 1960s. Wade would become involved in many civic endeavors, including the Park Commission that helped build the swimming pond in Collier Park in 1924. Mary would also continue her painting and was a well-known contributor to the local art community. The *Scout* and San Diego newspapers would often contain mention of meetings of renown San Diego artists and La Mesa social leaders at the Garfield home over the following decades. One notable event in May 1940 was touted as an outdoor fiesta and art show to be held on the Garfield's yard. Looking back this event featured a who's who of contemporary San Diego fine artists such as her

personal-friend Plein Air artist Charles A. Fries, and long admired painters such as Maurice Braun and Alfred Mitchell.

The Garfield Family children also continued to be significant community members. Oldest son Fenton Garfield eventually becoming a lawyer, FBI agent, and later City Councilman and District Judge. Daughter Ada served many years as a local schoolteacher and married Wayne Kuhlken, a community leader who the La Mesa National Little League field is named. Grandson Ken Kuhlken, an author and former SDSU professor, provided much of the Garfield family story and materials to the history center archives.



Wade and Mary Garfield family, c1928

Today the current owners, who purchased the home some twenty years ago, and had the property listed on the City Historical Register, have preserved and upgraded this classic Craftsman home and property. The History Center also has several of Mary Garfield's paintings which we hope to have displayed at the Lyster-Garfield House during our tour. It is the least we can do to help remember and honor La Mesa's "Jewel" of a lady.

Lookout Park: Mt Nebo and Artist Inspiration

We also will be featuring three houses located in Park-Grable's Lookout Park subdivision. The Company's third La Mesa Springs subdivision

dates to 1907 and was the first to develop on the slopes of the subtly named Mt. Nebo. Mt. Nebo being the hill Moses climbed to view the Promised Land. Wouldn't you like to live on a lot that overlooks the Promised Land!

to help pedestrians move up and down the steep hill. (The first of today's notable "Hidden Stairs" of Mt Nebo). Over the next couple of years several small houses were built on the Lookout Park tract.



Lookout Park ads, c1907-1910.

The Todds, Todd House, and the Mt. Nebo Club

In October 1911 Orien W. Todd, a successful businessman from Elgin, Illinois purchased several prominent view lots near Prospect Point. The *San Diego Union* reported that Todd was now satisfied that he had secured one of the best building sites in La Mesa. He was to return to Illinois to settle his affairs, prepare his family for the move, then return to La Mesa to oversee the construction of an elaborate residence on his lots. Such was the interest and excitement of this building news that it was reported in the Los Angeles-based *Southwest Contractor and Manufacturer* magazine on December 30, 1911, that:

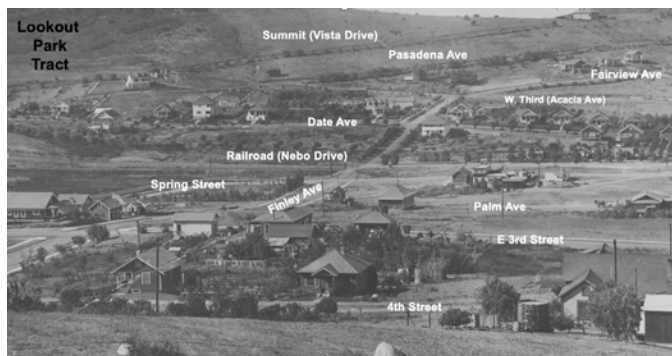
"O.W. Todd has had plans prepared for a modern residence to be erected on the crest of Mt Nebo. Contract to be awarded soon."
(SWCM Dec.30, 1911)

Interestingly, Ben Lyster was in charge of the subdivision survey and mapping. In fact, Lyster bought and sold numerous lots throughout the tract. Several of the streets cut across the east facing slope of the hill, wrapping around its north face out to the Chollas Road (now University Avenue). The specific "lookout" was the circular road surrounding the small Prospect Point Park at the top of the lower northern peak.

Todd had secured the plans for this elaborate and beautiful Prairie Influenced residence from the Los Angeles architectural firm of E.W. Stillwell (in fact the owners still have copies of the plans). Elmer Stillwell, a South Dakota native who had studied the cutting-edge work of Chicago's Prairie School when at the University of South Dakota, had moved to Los Angeles and opened his practice in 1905. His firm was most famous for advertising their popular house plan books that were in magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *The Craftsman*. Todd family lore is that they had seen the plan book advertised in *The Craftsman*.

It took a couple of years to get the roads graded, and several are still narrow and steep in comparison to today's streets. Additionally, the tract introduced the cutting-edge hillside subdivision practice of adding public stairways

In February 1912 the *Union* reported that O.W. Todd had returned and was erecting a beautiful \$8000 home which would be one of the largest and most artistic in La Mesa. In the meantime, it was reported that the Todds were staying at



View north to Lookout Park streets cut into Mt. Nebo, c1910.

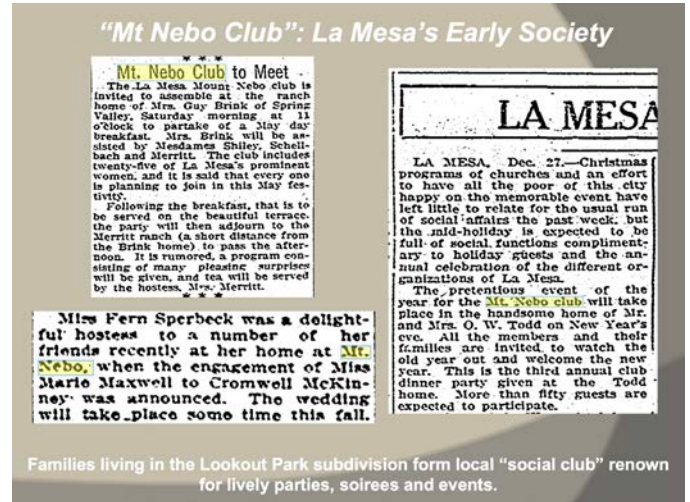
the U.S. Grant Hotel downtown where they were hosting their extended family from Illinois. Finally, in time for 4th of July 1912 the *Union* covered the joint July 4th/housewarming party which featured fireworks and refreshments. It was noted that the new hearth was lit, and the house had been christened "Keewaydin," said to be an Indian term for the north or home wind (for identifying direction to the trail leading home).



San Diego Union article on Todd housewarming July, 5, 1912. Author's collection.

The Todd House opening soon led to other significant home building, including the Worth House (1913) and the Hodgson House (1914) nearby. By 1913 newspapers reported on the town's most sought-after invitations, for the neighborhood's new "social club" known as the Mt. Nebo Club. The Mt Nebo Club became renowned for its lively parties, soirees and events such as on Christmas, New Year's Eve, Independence Day, and Easter morning. It was here that key families including the Todds, Worths, McDonalds, and Golders apparently started the tradition of a walk up to Prospect

Park, possibly as early as 1913, to meet the sunrise on Easter Morning.



In 1914 the first promoted Easter Sunrise Service was held at Prospect Park. The Todd's family piano was hauled up the hill to provide music for the services. Reportedly all of La Mesa's five churches had representatives and Dr. Henry Porter provided an Easter message himself. The event grew larger in both 1915 and 1916, with the entire La Mesa community invited to walk up in the dark, with services started at daybreak. As told in other articles, the Easter Sunrise services on Mt Helix, starting in 1917, would assume the annual tradition.



Crowd at Easter Sunrise Service, Prospect Park, 1915.

O.W. Todd, his wife Mary, and their four children, along with Mary's parents, Rev. W.A. and Julia Waterman, continued to live in the beautiful home for many decades. It is reported that legendary

horticulturalist Kate Sessions had some hand in the initial landscaping of the sweeping grounds.



Todd House with its lush landscaping, reportedly influenced by Kate Sessions, c1920.

Todd would eventually sell his Illinois millinery (ladies' hats) business and open an equally successful San Diego operation. Orien and Mary continued to be beloved local citizens, and a reported 200 attended their 50th Wedding anniversary at the Congregational Church in 1947. Orien Todd Sr. passing away in 1956 at age 84.

In 1950 daughter Margaret, her husband Robert and their family shared the house with O.W. Sr. before relocating to Illinois. The rest of the family also led productive lives. O.W. Jr became renown as a local athlete and later opened a successful sporting goods store. Oldest son Harry Waterman Todd continued the family millinery business, and in the early 1950s moved into the house with his wife Thelma Jones Todd. Thelma was also very active in community and church activities in La Mesa, such as the La Mesa Welfare Association, and was a founding member of the La Mesa Historical Society in 1975. Thus, it is known that this tour is not the first time the History Center has benefited from events at the Todd House.

Luckily subsequent owners such as Steve Sund, who got the house listed on the Historical Register, and our current owners have agreed to let us all take a step back in time to this wonderfully preserved piece of early La Mesa social pride and elegance.



Todd House living room and hearth, lit for the first time on July 4, 1912.

Windsor Hills and the Filling In of Lookout Park

During the Real Estate Boom of the 1920s, the Love and Touhey firm subdivided the property directly south along the ridge up today's Summit Drive as Windsor Hills. Typical of 1920s exclusive suburbs they continued the public staircases up to the southern summit (known for a short while as Pt. Airy). During the Interwar Years (1920s and 1930s) in San Diego, this was the time of "Revival" style homes, with Spanish Eclectic or Mediterranean Revival styles the region's most popular. With many of the best Windsor Hills and Lookout Park lots still undeveloped, it is not surprising that typical Revival style homes from the period would continue to be built on Mt. Nebo. Another one of our Tour Homes is just such a home.

James and Corinne Dall Home: Spanish Eclectic Gem

Set on an impressive view lot facing Prospect Point, the James and Corrine Dall House represents the 1930s version of a Mt. Nebo dream house. Records indicate that the Dalls purchased the vacant lot from then mayor Ben Polak, who lived on Mt Nebo as well. The Dalls having previously rented on Mt. Nebo for nearly a decade prior to building this home. The home was completed in November 1938. The contractor and designer remain a mystery, although family lore indicated that it may have

been built by the owners themselves.

It is classic Spanish Eclectic style home that was still very popular at the time. The two-story stucco with red tile roof reflective of the businessman James Dall's, owner for several years of the Ford Dealership in El Cajon, status in the community.



James & Corrine Dall House, built 1938.

Interestingly, James would sell his El Cajon Ford dealership to La Mesan Elmer Drew and return to Elyria, Ohio in 1939, looking after his business interests there. Wife Corrine and their three sons preferring the weather and lifestyle in La Mesa and stayed here.

As indicative of our Preservation Heroes theme, the Dalls two eldest sons both served in WWII. Lt. George Dall, a B-29 flight officer and the eldest son being killed in action in 1944. Mrs. Dall's patriotic zeal was well-known as she served on the San Diego Republican Central Committee for many years. She was a regular editorial writer to the *San Diego Union* in support of Conservative and veterans' issues.

James Dall retired and returned full time to San Diego around 1960. He and Corrine sold the home in 1963, moving to La Jolla. The next owners, the Kohl's owned the property for several years, made several improvements, such as constructing the garden walls and elaborate landscaping. The current owner has owned the home for nearly 30 years. In keeping with our art theme, she has had the interior of the home painted by a noted illustrator, featuring her passion for animals and nature. The decor

also includes photographs of her world travels and decorative art installations throughout the grounds. It is another not to be missed Tour home.

Lookout Park Pioneering Home, now Eclectic Menagerie of Art and Artisanhip

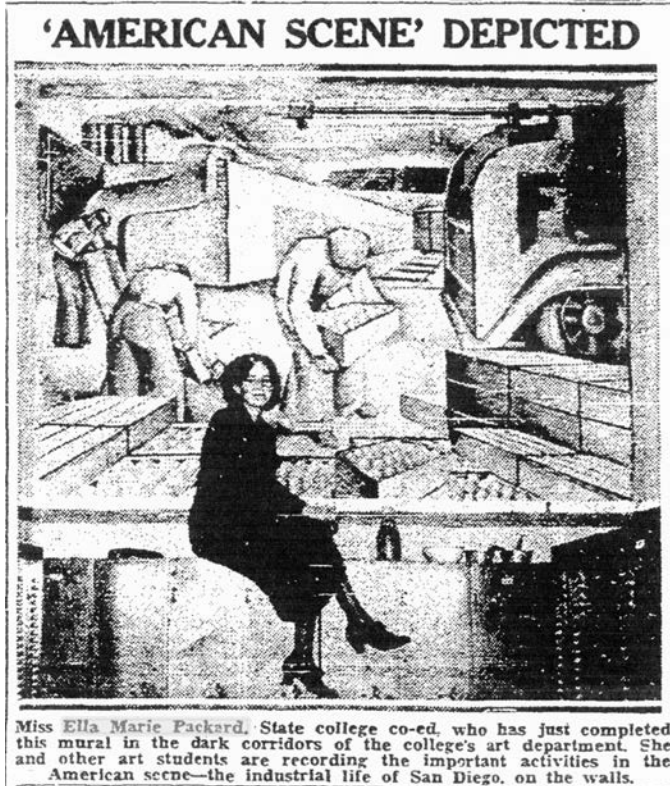
Our last Tour Home is also located in Lookout Park. Its original construction appears to date to 1910. County building records indicate that a second story was added c1929 (which was previously believed to be the building's construction date). The reason for the second story was the large family of new homeowner Phineas Packard. Packard, his wife Marie, daughters Ellamarie and Dorothy, sons Rolland and Lee, and father-in-law M.E. Pittman all moved into the renovated home in November 1929.



*Phineas Packard (right) receives award for long-time service to Salvation Army, 1959.
Author's collection.*

Packard was already a well-known owner and publisher of San Diego's Arts & Crafts Press. The family had moved to La Mesa around 1926 and were looking for a place to raise their four children. As well as being a well-respected businessman, Packard was known for work with the Salvation Army, civic clubs, and benefactor to photography and amateur film groups. Marie was also very involved in the community. She was an active member of the local P.T.A., Welfare Association, and Women's Club. Marie regularly held meetings, events, and parties at the house with many other community leaders, including Mrs. Todd, Garfield, Coutts, and Porter.

Their eldest daughter Ellamarie Packard would eventually become an even more acclaimed artist and artisan. A graduate of Grossmont High and San Diego State College, Ellamarie had been involved in music and visual arts since a child. She was involved in painting some of the original WPA style murals while at SDSC and studied with noted professors Belle Baranceanu and Ilse Hamman (Ruocco).



*San Diego Union March 6, 1935.
Author's collection.*

While teaching art at Francis Parker School, she met fellow teacher, actor/director, and artist Jackson Woolley, whom she would marry in 1940.

Ellamarie and Jackson would become full time artists after World War II, becoming leaders in the notable San Diego Allied Craftsman group (featured in last year's tour). The Woolleys cutting-edge work in Modern enamel on copper pieces, eventually receiving national notoriety and exhibitions prior to Ellamarie's death in 1976. The current owner of the home has one of their unique pieces on display.



*San Diego Union March 30, 1969.
Author's collection.*

After Marie passed away in December 1941, Phineas sold the home in 1945. He continued to be a well-respected community leader until his passing in 1961. Sidney Campbell, a telephone company manager, and family lived in the home for several years before Mr. and Mrs. J. Augustin Lambert purchased the home in 1952. The Lamberts would hold onto the home until the current owner's purchase in 1993.

Our current owner is a local gem as well, a long-time theatre professor, he has eclectically theme-furnished the entire home and grounds with notable antiques, artifacts and art of artisans including Ellamarie and Jackson Woolley,

western artist Olaf Wieghorst, photographer/illustrator Robert Vavra, SOHO founder/artist Robert Miles Parker, and acclaimed Broadway costume designer Gregg Barnes. This home also features a first for the La Mesa Home Tour—a treehouse, and not just any treehouse, but a Pirate themed treehouse.



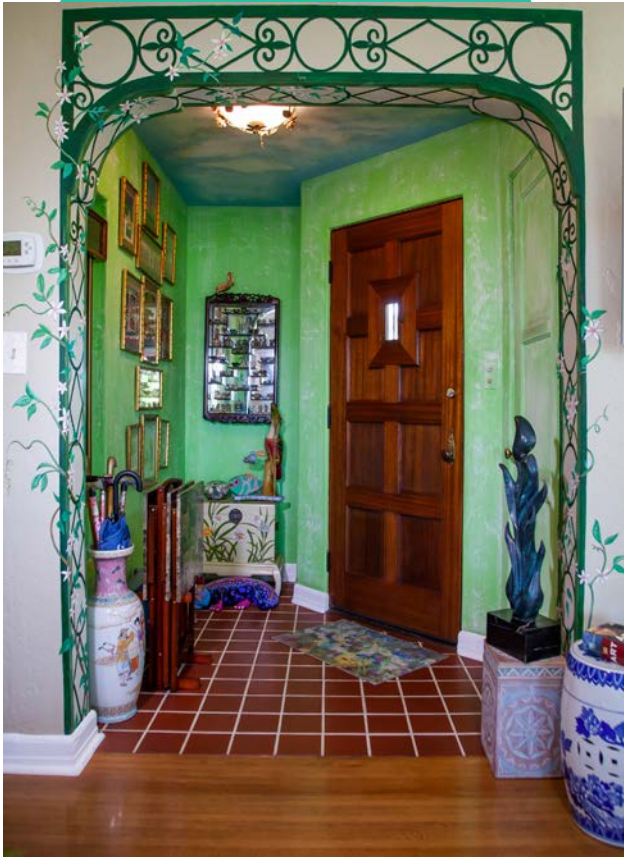
Packard House.

The property is one of the most uniquely decorated and fascinating homes to be on our tours. We only remind visitors to try and see all the various rooms and vignettes—but remember the tour only lasts six hours!

Hope to See You On the Tour!

Once again, we thank our generous homeowners for opening these Greater La Mesa area gems to tour guests—they are our Heroes! This year's tour looks to be another memorable event. Don't miss it! Get Your Tickets Now!

***James D. Newland,
La Mesa History Center***





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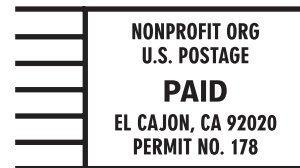
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The **Lookout Avenue** is the official quarterly publication of the La Mesa History Center. Closing dates for submitting contributions are the 1st of every March, June, September, and December. Word document and jpeg image files preferred.

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