

*Mark your calendar*

*Quarterly History  
Roundtable*

*\* Sat., May 28 \**

*Flag Day parade*

*\* Sat., June 4 \**

*Summer Celebration*

*\* Sat., July 16 \**

# Lookout Avenue



**Volume 29 Number 6 Summer 2005**

## ***A closer look at Madame Schumann-Heink***

By Donna Niemeier

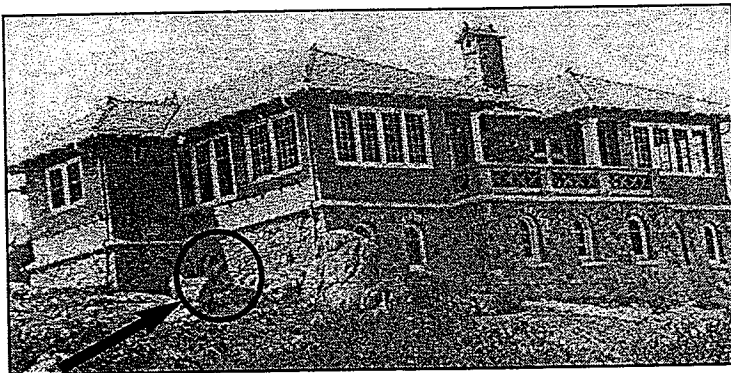
Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink was a world-famous opera singer, who sang professionally for more than 50 years. Her voice was enjoyed by Queen Victoria, Edward the Prince of Wales and Teddy Roosevelt at the White House. She was a woman of the world who traveled and sang in Germany, England, the Far East and the United States. Royalty and the famous knew her, but she was also considered a woman of the people.

Born Ernestine Roessler in 1851 near Prague, Czechoslovakia, she started formal voice training at the age of 13, and at 16, was singing in minor roles for the Royal Dresden Opera. In 1882, she married Ernst Heink, and by 1887, they had four children. She later divorced Heink and married Paul Schumann in 1893, with whom she had three children.

In 1898, she signed a six-month contract to sing for the New York Metropolitan Opera. After her husband's death in 1904, she brought five of her children to the U.S., and in 1908



Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink raising morale for the war effort in New York, circa 1918.



The Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink House, circa 1913. When designing the house, architect Del Harris forgot to provide an entry to the servants quarters, forcing them to enter and exit through the upstairs living room. The problem was corrected in 1914. The House remains largely unchanged today.

trees and foliage. The two tall Washington Palms still standing today were planted at this time.

Schumann-Heink sang in 1915 at Balboa Park's Organ Pavilion to open the Panama-California Exposition. She lived at Villa Ernestina until 1925, when she bought a home from J.S. Spreckles in Coronado. She gave her Grossmont property to a Disabled War Veterans organization. In 1936, she became ill and passed away.

became a U.S. citizen.

She was not content with a conventional opera career singing for the New York Metropolitan Opera, preferring the more intimate contact of the concert and recital hall. During WWI, Schumann-Heink had sons fighting for both America and Germany.

In 1910, Schumann-Heink gave a concert in San Diego, and it was at this time that she renewed her friendship with an old theatrical friend, William Gross. He interested her in buying land that he and real

estate partner Ed Fletcher owned in East County. Her home on a two-acre site (in the Grossmont area) was completed in 1912 and was named "Villa Ernestina."

Kate Sessions planted the garden with sub-tropical

**To learn more about Madame Schumann-Heink, call (619) 466-0197 to reserve space for the May 28 Schumann-Heink program. Space is limited and going fast!**

## A note from the president

by Gordon Jones



It's been 30 years since the inception of the La Mesa Historical Society and we will celebrate it this July. And, it has fulfilled its mission very nicely, we think. We hope you will continue to be a part and to encourage the support of others.

We will have recently elected a new board of directors, but we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to board directors **Leslie Tonkinson** and **Bob Freeland**, who have concluded their terms. They have chaired special events, attended functions, served as docents and contributed to the continued success of the organization. Never fear, they will still be involved.

We are exploring our role in the community and our appeal to a younger constituency that needs to become involved to continue our accomplishments. Therefore, you may see the use of an up-to-date name, events and terms. This is difficult when you are used to doing things in a certain way for so many years, but we are giving it all serious thought. If you have input, please write or call.

### La Mesa Historical Society, Board of Directors

July 1, 2004-June 30, 2005

**President:** Gordon Jones

**1st Vice President:** Donna Niemeier

**2nd Vice President:** Ruth Contino

**3rd Vice President:** Leslie Tonkinson

**Secretary:** Sharon Crockett

**Treasurer:** Donna Niemeier

**Past President:** Karna Webster

#### Directors-at-Large:

Stephanie Glazer

Ed Blackman

Kathy Tinsley

Bob Freeland

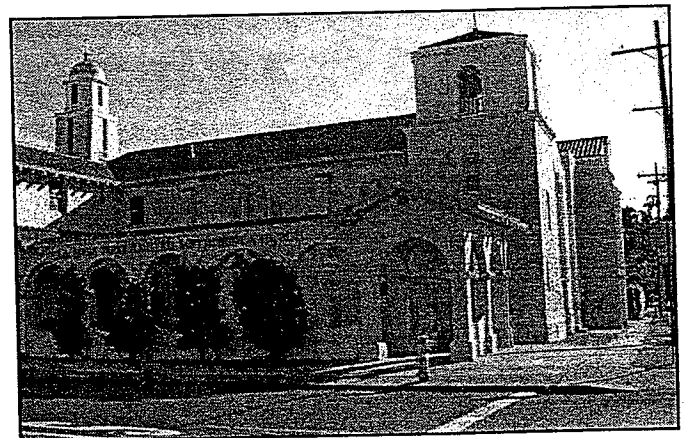
Virginia Hill

**This newsletter is created by LMHS  
Newsletter Editor, Stephanie Glazer.  
For information or suggestions,  
contact her at (619) 466-0197.**

## Historic Preservation Commission roundup

As a new feature to this newsletter, we will keep you informed on the activities and actions that La Mesa's Historic Preservation Commission takes. The Commission acts as advisor to City Council on matters of historic preservation. The La Mesa Historical Society has three seats on this seven-member Commission. The LMHS Commissioners are Gordon Jones, Stephanie Glazer and Donna Niemeier.

In March 2005, the Commission approved a proposal of the First United Methodist Church of La Mesa to make modifications to the original entry courtyard by construction of an attractive labyrinth with art tiles, grillwork and landscaping. This Spanish Colonial-style church was constructed in 1921 at Lemon and Palm Avenues and is one of our city's finer historic structures.



First United Methodist Church in Downtown La Mesa.

## LMHS welcomes its newest members

*They are: Maryellen Huhn, Sandra Cavanagh, Mary A. Flores, Ron & Dale May, Jim Newland, Claire Condra, Tracey Stotz, and Brian and Judy Shear.*

*It's great to have you with us!*

## JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY

**Saturday, July 16**  
**McKinney House & Museum,**  
**8369 University Ave., La Mesa**  
**4-7 p.m.**

Come join the La Mesa Historical Society and help us celebrate our 30th anniversary with a sizzling summer celebration. Enjoy live nostalgic music by The Ideas, low-cost burgers from Johnnie B's Burgers & Brew and take a tour through the McKinney House and learn about the Society's 30-year history from pictures, newsletters and albums. There will be arts & crafts, and of course, a raffle, where you could win a handmade quilt, a 1940's tinware basket and much more.

### Members, guests learn about La Mesa railroad history

Respected railroad historian **Bruce Semelsburger** spoke to a full house at a recent LMHS quarterly history roundtable. The visuals Bruce brought with him detailed the impact of the railroad had on the development of La Mesa.

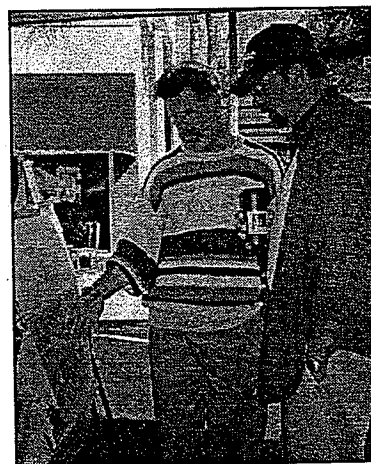
This program was the second of a series. The third will feature a presentation on the world-renowned Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink. Most of these well-attended programs are held in our own Palermo archives building, located directly behind the McKinney House.



Railroad historian Bruce Semelsburger

### LMHS was out in full force at the Antique Street Faire

For this second-annual event, the La Mesa Village Merchant Association gave the La Mesa Historical Society two spaces, rather than the single one



La Mesa resident and soon-to-be La Mesa Historical Society board member David Kievit, pictured above left, points out La Mesa on an early photograph.

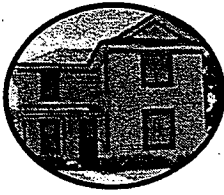
we had last year. With the construction of the new fire station, we found it appropriate to feature the pictorial history of La Mesa's Fire Department.

Twelve dedicated volunteers assisted in the La Mesa Historical Society's booth, detailing La Mesa history to our many visitors, and enjoying what is a highlight of our many activities. Be sure to come see us in March 2006.

### Rose Garden Celebration and English Tea a smashing success

On Saturday, April 30, the La Mesa Historical Society honored seven people at its annual Rose Garden Celebration. The Society recognizes former La Mesa residents who have had a significant impact on the City of La Mesa. Those honored were Helen Lu Magee Jessop, Helen "Woody" Linke, Olive Mannen, Thomas "Carl" McCarthy, Lenore Branam Porter, James Tank Porter, and Norrie West.

After the celebration, an English Tea was served in the McKinney House to 45 friends and family members of the honorees.



**La Mesa Historical Society**

Museum: Rev. Henry A. McKinney House (1908)  
8369 University Ave., La Mesa, CA 91941  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA. 91944

**Change service requested**

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
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Permit No. 208

**An invitation to join the La Mesa Historical Society**

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

*The society depends on membership dues, bequests and fund-raising activities to support the restoration and preservation of local history.*

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

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

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

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

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*Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*