

La Mesa Historical Society

LOOKOUT AVENUE

Volume 30, Issue 18

Spring/Summer, 2009

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



It is my good fortune to have become president of the La Mesa Historical Society at an exciting time. The Board of Directors you have elected work like a "well oiled machine" and we are planning on continuing our successful established events. Also, La Mesa will be observing its centennial in 2012, and I invite you to join us in celebrating a century of La Mesa's history.

To keep the centennial foremost in your mind, over the next two years, I plan on highlighting historic La Mesa with little bits of trivia gleaned from our old copies

of the La Mesa Scout. The following is an excerpt from a 1908 article about **Colonel Randlett's Home.**

"... The colonel has grounds around his residence numbering 20 acres. Eight acres of this is devoted to raising of fine lemons, which bear large quantities of fruit, while 1 acre is in grapefruit and another in tangerines. The other 10 acres make up convenient pasture land for his stock.

The residence contains 14 large modern rooms with every up to date convenience. It is only about a mile to the business district of La Mesa Springs and commands a superb view of massive mountains (to the East) and downtown La Mesa Springs (to the Southwest)."

Where was this house and what was it named? Let us know and we will print your name and the answer in our next newsletter.

Remember, our website is lamesahistoricalsociety.com.

Donna Niemeier

LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President

Donna Niemeier

Past President

Gordon Jones

1st Vice President

Aaron Landau

2nd Vice President

Ruth Contino

Secretary

Sharon Crockett

Treasurer

Rod Whitlow

Directors-at-Large

Ed Blackman

Tom Hart

Aaron Landau

Cherie Peacock

Linda Rankin

Kathy Tinsley

COMING EVENTS

The following East County History lectures will be held 9:30-11:00 am at the La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center's Craft Room (1\$ per lecture, RSVP at (619) 464-0505):

July 27, 2009 "Campo Railroad, Camp Lockett & Buffalo Soldiers": Presenter: Richard Borstadt, Executive Director of the San Diego Railroad Museum

August 3, 2009

"El Cajon History": Presenter: Eldonna Lay, Author of El Cajon City Book. 8/10 Spring Valley Bancroft Adobe House
Presenter: Jim Van Meter, Caretaker, The Bancroft House

August 17, 2009

"Lakeside": Presented by Lakeside Historical Society

The following will take place in the City of La Mesa:

November 7, 2009:

2009 Historic Home Tour

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

A new tradition of the La Mesa Historical Society is honoring an outstanding member. On May 2, 2009 at our Rose Garden Celebration, Annual Meeting and English Tea, the organization honored long time member Ed Blackman for his outstanding service by presenting him with the Volunteer of the Year Award. Ed joined the Historical Society in the fall of 1987 and has continued to serve in a variety of positions including President, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Vice president, grounds chair, speaker, and fundraiser. Ed is especially appreciated for his care of the beautiful rose garden, for procuring the live Christmas tree for the Christmas Open House, and for the wonderful ginger bread he and his wife, Beth, bake during the Christmas Open House. He is always available to help set up tents, move tables and chairs, transport exhibits and supplies for our special events. So, if you drive by the McKinney

House and see someone tending the roses, it's him. Thank you, Ed.

LA MESA: The Early Years (DVD)

Imagine taking an international flight out of La Mesa Airport. La Mesa did have one, you know. We also had a pretty nice Country Club just south of town – this side of the airport. We might have hosted the U. S. Open. We have produced a new DVD, 26 minutes in length, with 85 photographs of historic La Mesa, backed by appropriate music. The DVD is for sale at the McKinney House archives (Palermo Building) and costs \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members. Please stop by to pick one up. We have ordered only a limited number of copies. If you want it mailed, send a check for \$30.00 to the La Mesa Historical Society, P. O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 91941.

NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to the individuals below for joining the La Mesa Historical Society. Their contribution assists our cause to preserve the city's history and to keep it for generations to come. We invite them (and all of you) to come by the McKinney House to visit with us and look through our collection and extensive historical archive.

Jeff and Kerry Minch
Robert Bridgman
Rachel Neigel & Rolando Flores
Nancy Guthrie
Lynn Mary Christopher

PAST PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

It has been eight extremely rewarding years serving the Society as President and we have been very successful in developing great new programs and events, maintaining our properties, building a superb financial condition and growing a remarkable and responsive membership base.

I can use superlatives freely because of the quality of our Board of Directors. They are active and appear to help at almost every function. To give credit where credit is certainly due, and to make you aware of who makes things happen, I cite:

Donna Niemeier, newly-elected President. She does it all and participates in everything, including organizing our first-rate High Tea in the Spring (for nine years, no less).

Ruth Contino, Second Vice President. She has managed all our membership needs for these many years. She owns a designated La Mesa Historic Landmark house.

Sharon Crockett, Secretary. Sharon has, for years, kept track of what happens in meetings and official doings.

Rod Whitlow, Treasurer. Relatively new, he knows his financials, and is also going to be co-chair of the 2009 Historic Home Tour.

Ed Blackman, Director. Ed has been a Director, President and do-everything guy for a long time, and even now,

supervises our rose garden and grounds. He is very good at helping us maintain a proper historical perspective.

Tom Hart, Director. Tom volunteers with all the hard stuff, and now works to enhance communications, especially *Lookout Avenue*, our newsletter, and our web site.

David Kievit, Ex-Director. David maintained and upgraded our properties beautifully, but left the Board to further develop a Bed and Breakfast in New York with his wife Dot. However, he'll still oversee our properties since they escape the east coast cold and return to La Mesa for the winter every year. They own a designated La Mesa Historic Landmark.

Aaron Landau, Director. Aaron will serve as First Vice President, with an eye to becoming President in the near future. He also chairs our series of History Roundtables, and is Chair of our newly appointed La mesa Centennial Committee.

Linda Rankin, Director. Linda has chaired our recent Quilt Show and will serve as a co-chair of the Historic Home Tour.

Kathy Tinsley, Director. Kathy has served as Christmas Open House Chair for a few years, as a Director for several terms, and Antique Street Faire LMHS display chair. She also owns a designated La Mesa Historic Landmark house.

We have had a stable Board for several years which is integral to an organization's success. Others have served well in past years, and our

incoming Board member, Cherie Peacock, should fit right in. Most importantly, we thank each and every one of you for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you at future events. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and getting to know a couple of hundred of you in my eight years. Here's to the next eight!

A LITTLE-KNOWN HERO

As a volunteer, I truly enjoy the research that goes into the preparation of a report necessary for designating a house on Lemon Avenue a La Mesa Landmark. It not only is a house designed by the preeminent architect of Rancho Santa Fe, Lilian Rice, but was built by Rear Admiral Cyril Thomas Simard (USN, ret.), a decorated commander of Midway Island during the World War II Battle of Midway. I write this over the 2009 Memorial Day weekend, which seems altogether apropos.

Ensign Cyril Simard was assigned in 1918 as an air observer on several ships of the Pacific Fleet, and then, in 1927, began a series of tours as commander of observation squadrons on a series of battleships, including the U.S.S. *California*.

In 1934, Lt. Commander Simard served aboard the USS *Langley* as a veteran naval pilot and air officer. As many know, the *Langley* was the US Navy's first aircraft carrier, converted in 1920 from the collier USS *Jupiter*. *Langley* fought in WWII, but she was so badly damaged by a Japanese air attack that she was sunk by her escorts in February, 1942. Commander Simard also served as executive officer of Naval

Air Station North Island in 1940 and 1941. On August 1, 1940, Commander Cyril Simard was named commander of the naval base at Midway Island.

Measuring less than six miles in diameter, Midway atoll is 1135 miles northwest of Pearl Harbor. It contained a Pan-American Airways terminal and a small contingent of Marine fighter planes. Pan American Airways, quick to realize Midway's commercial importance, began construction of a commercial seaplane base in April, 1935.

The Battle of Midway is generally considered the turning point of the Pacific theatre of World War Two. The taking of Midway Island was a critical part of Japan's Admiral Yamamoto's grand strategy for the Japanese conquest of the United States. It has been recounted in many ways: multitudinous books, photos and the now-classic 1976 motion picture *Midway*.

Simard's role as commander of Midway was important enough to warrant his character's place in the movie. Simard's aide was played by Tom Selleck.

Promoted to the rank of Captain prior to the battle, Simard served during the Battle of Midway with Admirals Frank Jack Fletcher, Raymond Spruance, Marc Mitscher and Robert English, renowned names all.

Simard and his staff, together with Colonel Shannon and his Marines were consumed with preparations for the defense of the atoll. Simard ordered air searches by Catalina PBY flying boats, searching for the massive Japanese

fleet. Eventually, the first contact was made by Midway-based planes. He reacted immediately to the contact report, sending out nine B-17 bombers. They and armed PBY flying boats made attacks on the invasion force, but this action was only a prelude to the major battle to come. Midway suffered many casualties through ongoing air attacks, but the invasion never came to be.

For his actions during the Battle of Midway, he received the Distinguished Service Medal for bravery, presented to him by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz. The citation reads, in part:

"For exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service in a position of great responsibility as Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Midway Island, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the period June 3 - 7, 1942."

In September, 1942, Captain Simard commissioned the new Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, located in Washington. It became a base for F4F Wildcats, F6F Hellcats, SBD Dauntless dive bombers and seaplanes.

After Whidbey Island, Simard - in the rank of Commodore - in 1944, served as commander, Naval Air Bases, Thirteenth Naval District. On January 1, 1947, Cyril Simard retired with the rank of Rear Admiral.

Cy, as friends knew him, and Lee Hall Simard had a daughter, Joan, who lived in the house on Lemon Avenue until she married a young Navy officer in a ceremony in the house in the early

1960's. The Simards sold the house in 1965 and moved to La Jolla.

He retired with his first star as a Rear Admiral. Admiral Simard, a native of California, was born in 1895 and passed away in 1976 in Texas at the age of 81.

Gordon Jones

ROSE GARDEN HONOREES

At the annual meeting held on Saturday, May 2, 2009 Terry Baugh, Mary-Em Howard, Virginia Mellon, and Ben Polak were honored and their names places on the Rose Garden plaque.

Terry Baugh moved to La Mesa several years ago and soon after joined the La Mesa Historical Society. Until his death in August of 2008 he was one of the Society's close and valued neighbors.

Mary-Em Howard has been a vital member of the La Mesa community for over 50 years. She has spent thousands of hours doing volunteer work for Mercy Hospital, the Salvation Army, Mission San Diego de Alcala, the La Mesa Historical Society and La Mesa Beautiful. In 1992 Mary-Em was named volunteer of the year at Mercy Hospital. She also received the Salvation Army Woman of Dedication award, was named Queen of the Holy Rosary by the Mission San Diego de Alcala, and has received the Citizen of the Year Award from La Mesa Beautiful.

Virginia Mellon has been an active citizen of La Mesa for 66 years. She has five children, six Grandchildren and nine Great-grandchildren. Her children have all completed the La Mesa and

Grossmont education systems and she has been presented with the PTA Life Membership Girl Scouting has been her love for 79 active participation years. She has received acknowledgements for membership in the Sharp-Grossmont Hospital Volunteer program and has 4,000 hours of volunteering to her credit. Virginia is an active member of the La Mesa First United Methodist Church, the San Diego County Manx Society, the La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center and the La Mesa Historical Society.

Ben Polak was La Mesa's tenth mayor, serving 6 two-year terms from 1936-1948. He dreamed up the very unique Tacky Wacky Carnival in 1945 which ran for several years, raising \$50,000 for the construction of the fine arts and library complex named after him. This building was recently demolished to make way for a new police station. Ben and his partners acquitted fifty acres in the vicinity of Dixieline Lumber and with his sons Ben and Jim developed the area and built many buildings. Ben also spearheaded the development of MacArthur Park, which was acquitted by the City in 1939. Ben died in 1965 at the age of 76.

BOARD ACTIONS

La Mesa Historical Board – During the first quarter of 2009 the Board met on the second Monday of the month. At every meeting we review and approve the past meeting minutes and the current financial report and discuss ongoing activities and future events including recent City of La Mesa Historic Preservation Commission landmarking activities.

In January the draft winter newsletter was discussed and plans for the January 17 Quarterly Round Table were completed. We began planning for the Fall Home Tour. President Jones reported on the city's installation of a cabinet in the library to hold a display screen for the various city videos including the DVD produced by the La Mesa Historical Society on the history of La Mesa. New LMHS "T" shirts with our logo were distributed (these shirts may be order/purchased).

In February, it was reported that at the Quarterly Round Table approximately 30 to 35 people attended the presentation on the history of the Cleveland National Park. Copies of two popular DVDs: \$3,000,000 movie (produced by La Mesa's historic movie colony) and the development of the amphitheater on Mount Helix were now available for purchase by the public. The Boy Scouts painted the back porch. And it was noted that the following repairs are needed: the wooden fence along the southerly property line, the light fixtures in the house, the kitchen window, and the front porch steps. An updated "Map of Landmark Structures and Sites La Mesa, California" is now available and a decision was made to have note cards printed with our logo.

In March, April 18, 2009 was set for the next Quarterly Round Table discussion on the history of the La Mesa Police Department. The committee working with the City on La Mesa's Centennial Celebration in 2012 gave a status report. A decision was made to participate in the City's Flag Day parade on May 30, 2009 and the purchase of a new amplifier system and the new

ceiling light fixtures for the McKinney House were approved.



La Mesa Historical Society participates in the May 30, 2009, Flag Day Parade



La Mesa Historical Society Rose Celebration, High Tea and Annual Meeting attendees.

Congratulations to the winners of our May 12, 2009 Annual Meeting Raffle: Sue Williamson, Donald Criswell, Virginia Mellon, Grace Fradenburg, Janice Kuykendall, Debbie Petreo, Leslie Tonkinson, Susie Ruggles, Kathy Greene, Carol Yaremko and Beth Blackman.



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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 91941
Change Service Requested

www.lamesahistoricalsociety.com

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

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY Membership Application

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

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

La Mesa Historical Society
P.O. Box 882
La Mesa, CA 91941

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

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Ph: (____) _____

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

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