



LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S

# LOOKOUT AVE.

VOLUME 7, ISSUE NUMBER 1

SEPTEMBER, 1983



## General Meeting

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## Silent Film Festival

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1:00--4:00 P.M.

BEN POLAK FINE ARTS CENTER, 8053 UNIVERSITY AVENUE

The La Mesa Historical Society will hold its September general meeting at the Ben Polak Center, 8053 University Avenue, adjacent to the La Mesa Library. A short business meeting will be conducted starting at 1:00 p.m., at which time proposed LMHS Bylaws changes will be voted on by the membership.

Following the meeting a program of four silent films made in the San Diego area will be presented.

Three Million Dollars, a 1911 western comedy, is one of the few films known to remain from the more than one hundred made by the American Film Manufacturing Company when it was based in the Lakeside and La Mesa areas in 1911 and 1912. This film, starring J. Warren Kerrigan, was made in Lakeside before the company moved to La Mesa in August, 1911.

Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life, featuring the famous race car driver, was filmed in Lakeside in 1913.

Also shown will be excerpts from The Pearl of Paradise, a South Sea island romance, and The Devil's Assistant, an early horror movie, both shot in San Diego by the Pollard Film Company, which was located in Balboa Park during the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and 1916.

Evelyn Estabrook, a pianist well known in the east county, will play background music for the films.

Popcorn, cider, and coffee will be available before the program and at intermission.

NOTE: Copies of the Bylaws incorporating the proposed changes are included in this newsletter. The two pages fold to form a

## THE QUILTERS

The La Mesa Historical Society Quilters were organized in the fall of 1978 so that members could practice a traditional craft and raise money for the Society by doing so.

The Quilters began by meeting once or twice a month at the home of Gail Chance, the first chairman of the group. After Julie Bras became chairman in 1980, the Quilters met at the McKinney House and at the home of Thelma Todd, which they will continue to do under new chairman Mildred Bryan. Meetings are now held every Wednesday morning from 10:00 to 12:00.

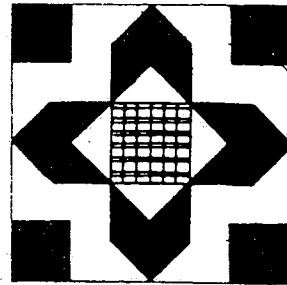
The fund raising activities of the Quilters have been very successful over the years. Each year the group makes a quilt for the Ice Cream Social drawing, which raises over \$600.00. The Quilters have also sold baby quilts, aprons, pillows, crocheted and embroidered pieces, and other items they have made, at such events as the Social, the Christmas Open House, the Oktoberfest, and the Grossmont Bazaar. Sales at these events have brought in varying amounts up to \$250.00. A new money-making idea currently being considered is accepting commissions to quilt tops for other people.

Some of the quilt patterns the group has done have been Dresden Plate (an applique), Flower Pot, Geese in the Pond, and, most recently, the Nell Cherry design. At present they have the Nell Cherry quilt completed and plan to sell it for \$250.00. Anyone who is interested in seeing it should call Mildred Bryan at 466-2801 or Beatrice Acers at 466-5812. Several baby quilts have also been completed and are available for purchase.

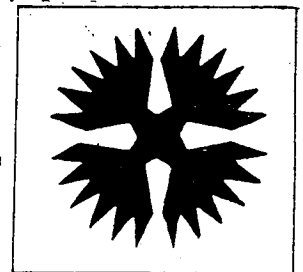
Donations of scrap material in cotton or cotton blends, either plain colored or printed, are always appreciated. Right now pastel colors are needed for the new quilt.

Members active in the past year, some of whom have been in the group since the beginning, are Beatrice Acers, Ethel Allen, Julie Bras, Mildred Bryan, Barbara Copeland, Jane Field, Carol Lockwood, Margaret Pearson, Thelma Todd, and Nadine Washburn.

Anyone who is interested in joining the group for either the quilting or the crafts is most welcome.



AUNT SUKEY'S CHOICE



CHIPS AND WHETSTONE

## CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION

La Mesa Historical Society Certificates of Appreciation were presented to Julie Bras and Beatrice Acers at the May 15 general meeting. Julie Bras has served as chairman of the Quilters since 1980, and Beatrice Acers has held the post of membership chairman for the past two years as well as being an active Quilter.

## LAWN PARTY

A lawn party was held on Sunday, August 21 at the McKinney House to honor and thank incoming board members and the many people who have helped the Society since its beginning in 1975. Champagne, fresh fruit, and cake were served outside and those who attended sat under the big pine tree and listened to old hymns and tunes being played on the McKinney parlor organ by Virginia Wurzbarger.

We are so appreciative of the many ways in which people have supported the Society these past eight years, from past officers and chairmen to all who have helped at our June Socials and Christmas Open Houses--the Quilters, Telephone Committee, docents, Cliff Coates, and so many others. A big round of applause to you! THANK YOU!!!

-Pat Kettler

LOOKOUT AVENUE is the official publication of the La Mesa Historical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 882, La Mesa, CA 92041. Published

## DEPOT UPDATE

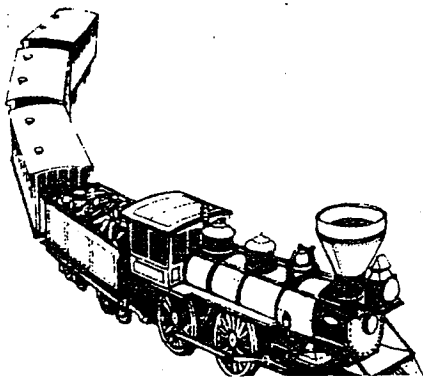
The Santa Fe caboose #1413, the Santa Fe cafe-lounge car #1509, the Union Pacific coach #576, and the troop kitchen car were all moved from the La Mesa Depot Museum to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum at Campo during the first week of August. The move was deemed desirable because abandonment is being sought for the main line on which Campo is located. The cars were part of the "Great Freight Train(s)" operation which received heavy coverage in the press and on television.

The removed equipment will be replaced at La Mesa. The La Mesa Chamber of Commerce, lessee of the "red car" (the ex-Santa Fe baggage-lounge), has agreed to allow the La Mesa Depot Museum staff to consider the feasibility of using the car on an interim basis; a major railroad is now looking for a "no-longer-needed" caboose for the La Mesa facility; and a privately-owned former Santa Fe/Amtrak dining car was expected to be on site on August 26.

The Depot Museum Management Committee is now planning La Mesa Depot Museum participation in the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce's annual Oktoberfest, set for September 29-30/October 1-2. Consideration will also be given to membership and special group activities at the Museum.

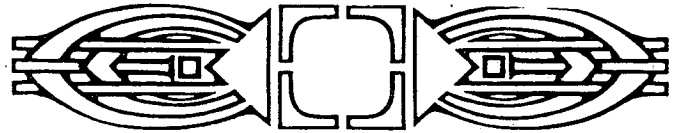
La Mesa Historical Society members are invited to bring family members and friends to the depot during the regular Saturday and Sunday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. public exhibit times. Group visitations can also be arranged at other times. Many LMHS members are docents for the Depot Museum; others are invited to sign up by calling Margaret Barksdale at 464-0061.

-Eric Sanders



## MARIE MCKINNEY DONATION

The La Mesa Historical Society became the recipient of an exceptionally generous donation in June of this year when Mrs. Marie McKinney canceled the balance of the Society's promissory note to her. This note formed one-third interest in the first trust deed on the McKinney House and at the time of cancellation the balance was \$7,320.38. The Society has made payments on a second trust deed since the McKinney House was purchased in 1975 and began to make payments on the first trust deed in May, 1981, when Donald McKinney was no longer able to live in the house. The Society is deeply appreciative of this gift and of the continuing support shown by Marie McKinney, Joyce and Ruth McKinney, and the entire McKinney family.



## PRESERVATION ELEMENT ADOPTED

An important step in the preservation of La Mesa's historic and cultural resources was taken on May 10 when the City Council adopted the Historic Preservation Element of the city's General Plan. This element calls for the establishment of a preservation commission or committee to develop and oversee a La Mesa Register of Historic Places.

Community Development Block Grant funds have been allocated for the expenses and staff support of the committee, and in August, planner Rachel Hurst was hired to work with the committee in the implementation of the element. Miss Hurst was formerly employed by the Los Angeles Conservancy, a non-profit preservation organization, where she coordinated a county-wide preservation project involving about forty cities. Among her initial activities in La Mesa will be the develop-

## 1983 ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Each year the Ice Cream Social is a success due to the participation of numerous dedicated members who work in many areas, including food preparation and service, the White Elephants, the Bake Sale, the Plant Sale, publicity, the Quilters, exhibits, yard maintenance, and set up and clean up.

This year those present enjoyed the entertainment provided by the Music Makers of El Cajon and the San Diego Highland Dancers Association. A special treat was to hear turn-of-the-century melodies played by Evelyn Estabrook on the original McKinney parlor organ, which had recently been donated to the Society and returned to its corner of the front room after an absence of over twenty years.

An exhibit of women's fashions and accessories from 1860 to 1900 incorporated examples of the crinolines and bustles which created the characteristic silhouettes of the period.

The Social ended with the drawing of the winning tickets in the raffle. The first prize "Geese in the Pond" quilt was won by Randy Landis. The second prize, a framed crewel embroidery donated by Crewel World, went to Erin Kettler. Pauline Jones won the third prize photo album donated by La Mesa Camera and Sound.

## MEMBERSHIP

At the end of June, 1983, the La Mesa Historical Society had a total of 377 members in the following categories: Life, 34; Patron, 11; Sponsor/Organization, 6; Family or Individual, 313; and Student, 13.

We would like to extend a welcome to our new members:

Charlene Ayers  
Mr. and Mrs. Don H. Criswell  
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Garretson  
Dr. and Mrs. George Holland  
Barbara Palmer  
Leo B. Patillo  
Julia V. Powell

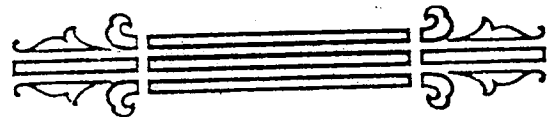
-Beatrice Acers

## Receipts

White Elephants	\$ 265.41
Bake Sale	289.15
Plants	42.30
Drawing	629.00
Quilters	98.50
Ice Cream	191.80
Food	646.21
Sales	21.25
Donations	39.69
Gross Profit	<u>\$2223.31</u>

## Expenses

Ice Cream	\$ 127.76
Chicken	138.60
A Rental World	77.17
Smart & Final (supplies & food)	76.79
Price Club (supplies & food)	111.35
Printing	90.26
Mailing	20.70
Xeroxing notices	3.08
Chemical toilet	26.50
Ice	5.25
	<u>-\$677.46</u>
Net Profit	\$1545.85



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

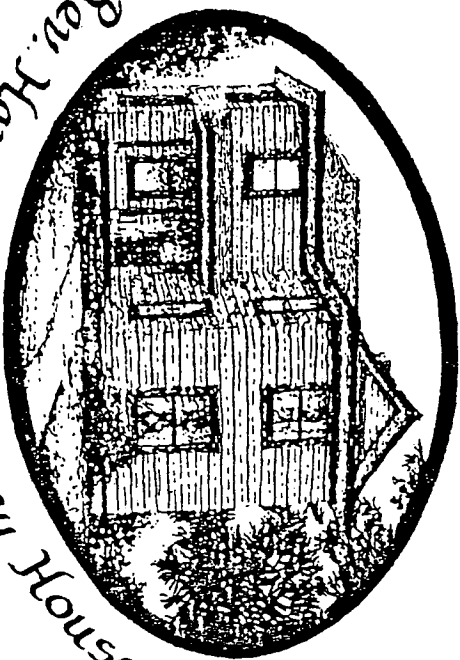
LMHS Secretary Henrietta Schupbach is continuing to transcribe the oral interviews in the Society's collection. She recently completed an interview made with Marie McKinney and is currently working on one made with Clare McCarthy Duermit.

During the past few months an interview has been taped with Jack Mashin, long-time coach at Grossmont High School, and additional recordings have been made of Joyce McKinney, and Jack Mercer, La Mesa's first police chief.

LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

BY LAWS

September 18, 1983



*Rev. Henry & Mc Kinney  
House  
(1908)*

Ion 5. In the event of the absence, disability or refusal of the president to act, the first vice president shall act in his stead. The second president is next in line to serve as acting president, and then the vice president. In the further event of the absence, disability, or refusal of the president and the vice presidents to preside at any meeting, the members of the Board of Directors shall be elected to preside.

Ion 6. The Secretary shall give notice of all business meetings of the Society and of the Board of Directors; cause a record of the proceedings at such meetings to be made and of all matters of which a record shall be kept; keep a register of names of the Board of Directors, appointive members and committees of the Society.

Ion 7. The treasurer shall have charge of all the funds and securities of the Society and make deposits, investments and withdrawals as may be approved by the Board; pay out only such funds as are authorized by the Board; regular accounts of the fiscal affairs of the Society, which accounts shall be subject to inspection by any member of the Society; make a report in writing at each regular meeting of the Board; furnish to the auditors, as where provided in these bylaws, in duplicate, a copy of his annual report; member of the Budget Committee.

ARTICLE VII - BUDGET

Ion 1. A committee, which shall include the President and the Treasurer, shall prepare an annual budget showing all amounts to be appropriated for the uses of the Society and estimating all revenues for the current fiscal year. The budget shall be presented for the approval of and adoption by the Board of Directors not later than the first Board meeting in each year. The budget may be amended from time to time during the year, subject to approval of the Board of Directors. (Unexpected appropriations shall lapse at the end of each fiscal year and shall not be carried forward, except as determined by the Board of Directors.)

Ion 2. The fiscal year (also known as annual year in these bylaws) shall be from July 1 of one year through June 30 of the following year.

ARTICLE VIII - AUDITORS AND COMMITTEES

Ion 1. The president shall appoint a committee of one or more to act as auditors. The auditors shall have access to the books and records of the Society and the treasurer at all reasonable times throughout the fiscal year and shall render an opinion on the financial statements included in the annual report of the Society. A financial statement and the opinion audit report shall be distributed to the Society membership annually.

Ion 2. The president, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors, shall designate such committees as may be needed to carry out the purposes of the Society.

Ion 3. Committee chairmen shall be appointed by the president for a term of one year and shall be subject to ratification by the Board of Directors. They shall be members in good standing of the Society and may attend meetings of the Board of Directors.

LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.  
BYLAWS

ARTICLE I - NAME AND PURPOSE

Section 1. The name of this organization is the La Mesa Historical Society, Inc.

Section 2. The primary purpose for the La Mesa Historical Society, Inc., is to offer a program and establish an historical museum which will foster the interest of citizens in the history of La Mesa, San Diego County, California and the Pacific Southwest.

ARTICLE II - MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. The Society shall provide the following classes of membership:

Life Membership shall be open to all persons 18 years of age or over who are interested in the purposes and activities of the Society and museum. Each life member is exempt from further payment of dues but has all the rights and privileges of membership including the right to vote and to hold office.

Patron Membership shall be open to all persons 18 years of age or over who are interested in the purposes and activities of the Society and museum and who wish to contribute an additional amount as specified in the dues structure. Each patron membership is entitled to one vote and to participate in all activities.

Sponsor/Organization Membership shall be open to all clubs, business firms, organizations and associations - civic, professional and social - which wish to further the interests of the Society and the museum. Each sponsor member is entitled to one vote and to participate in all activities.

Family Membership is open to all families who are interested in the purposes and activities of the Society and museum. Family membership includes the rights and privileges of membership. The right of vote and to hold office is limited to two persons 18 years of age or over in same family membership.

Individual Membership shall be open to all persons 18 years of age or over who are interested in and who will further the purposes and activities of the Society and the museum. Each individual member is entitled to one vote and to participate in all activities.

Student Membership shall be open to all students who are interested in the purposes and activities of the Society and museum. Each student has all the rights and privileges of membership except the right to vote and to hold office.

ARTICLE III - DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Section 1. Dues shall be paid by each member as provided for by action of the Board of Directors and ratification by the general membership.

Section 2. The Society may also receive voluntary contributions for its projects.

ARTICLE IV - MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY

Section 1. There shall be an annual meeting of the Society held in the month of May on such day and at such place as the Board of Directors shall designate.

Section 2. Other meetings may be called at any time by the president, by a majority of the Board of Directors, or by the secretary upon the written request of not less than fifteen (15) members of the Society entitled to vote.

Section 3. The presence of five percent of the membership at any business meeting of the Society shall be necessary to provide a quorum. If a quorum is not present within thirty (30) minutes after the time appointed for such a business meeting, the meeting shall be considered adjourned. The members may adjourn the meeting to be reconvened at a specified date, and the secretary is required to send all members of the Society notice of such adjournment and the new meeting date.

Section 4. Written notice of all meetings of the members shall be sent to every member at his listed address not less than ten (10) nor more than ninety (90) days prior to the date of the meeting. If the notice is not mailed first class, registered or certified, then it must be at least twenty (20) days prior to the date of the meeting.

Section 5. The order of business at all business meetings of the Society shall be that provided for such meetings of the society. At special meetings (other than the annual meeting or regular business meetings) only business specified in the notice of the meeting may be acted upon.

ARTICLE V - BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Section 1. The governing body of this Society shall be a Board of Directors consisting of the officers, the immediate past president and five (5) directors at large.

Section 2. The five directors at large shall be elected at the annual meeting of the Society, each for a term of two years, on a staggered term basis. One person shall not be eligible to serve more than two consecutive (4 years) terms as Director.

Section 3. Any director may be removed by a vote of the membership.

Section 4. If any vacancy shall occur among the members of the Board during the year by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise, the Board shall appoint a member of the Society to fill the vacancy for the balance of the unexpired term for which the vacated director was previously elected. Whenever an immediate past president is not available for membership on the Board of Directors, the Board shall appoint a member of the Society to fill the vacancy for a period not to exceed one year. The vacancy will be filled anew each succeeding year when this is necessary.

Section 5. The Board of Directors shall have general charge and control of the affairs, funds and property of the Society and shall carry out the purposes of the Society in accordance with these bylaws; but the Board shall not alter, amend, or rescind any resolution or motion duly adopted at a business meeting of the Society. All agreements with other organizations shall be ratified by the Board of Directors of this Society.

Section 6. The Board of Directors shall adopt rules and procedures for conduct of its meetings thereof. The Board shall keep a record of its meetings and such record shall be available for inspection by any member of the Society at all reasonable times. Copies of minutes of meetings shall be mailed by the secretary to all directors.

Section 7. Meetings may be held upon the call of the president, or any (3) directors at such time and place as may be specified in the call, five (5) days notice by mail to the directors stating the purpose of the meeting. When a majority of the directors is present, the meeting shall be to have been regularly called and noticed unless otherwise objected to. Members present may adjourn the meeting to be reconvened at a specified date without further notice to the directors.

Section 8. Except as otherwise specifically provided in these bylaws affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the Board of Directors are present shall be necessary and sufficient to adopt any motion or resolution.

Section 9. At any Board of Directors meeting of the Society, the presence (6) members in person shall be necessary to provide a quorum.

Section 10. The directors present at any meeting of the Board may call mail convocations to be made of the members of the Society on any matter in which a written expression of opinion may be desired, but such expression of opinion, as a result of such mail convocations, shall not be binding on the Board of Directors of the Society as a formal vote.

ARTICLE VI - OFFICERS

Section 1. The officers of the Society shall be a president, a first president, a second vice president, a third vice president, a secretary and treasurer, all of whom shall be members of the Society.

Section 2. The officers shall be elected at the annual meeting in accordance with the following: The election of directors shall hold office from the year in which they are elected through June 30 of the following year until the election and qualification of their respective successors or until the election and qualification of the La Mesa Historical Society for a one year period prior to election and must be able to attend business and hold meetings regularly. The term of office shall be one year. All office subjects to annual election and shall not be eligible to serve more than (2) consecutive years in the same office. The office of Treasurer may be re-elected to the two (2) year limit.

Section 3. If any vacancy shall occur in an office during the fiscal year by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise, the Board shall appoint a member of the Society to fill the vacancy for the unexpired term.

Section 4. In addition to the duties and prerogatives prescribed elsewhere in these bylaws, the president shall preside at all meetings of the Society and the Board of Directors enforces the bylaws of the Society; conduct correspondence as he and the Board of Directors may consider to be in the best interests of the Society; perform all executive and other duties arising out of the office of the president; be "ex-officio" member of all committees except the nominating committee.

ARTICLE IX - AMENDMENTS

Section 1. An amendment to the Articles of Incorporation or the corporation bylaws may be introduced at any regular business meeting by a member, or by an officer of the corporation acting on behalf of the Board of Directors. It shall then be submitted to the Board of Directors, and, if desired, a committee for study. The proposed amendment shall then be made known to the membership by a mailing or in a corporation publication. At the following regular business meeting, a report of the study of the Board of Directors and a committee, if any, shall be given, after which the amendment requires a two-thirds majority vote of the members present at the regular business meeting, providing a quorum is present.

Section 2. A special or regular meeting for consideration of an amendment or amendments may be called at any time as provided for in Article IV, Section 2.

Section 3. These bylaws and amendments, thereto, shall become effective immediately after approval.

ARTICLE X - NOMINATIONS

Section 1. Sixty (60) days prior to the annual meeting, a nominating committee shall be chosen. The election of the nominating committee shall be announced in the meeting notice. The committee shall consist of one (1) member and one (1) alternate appointed by the president; two (2) members and two (2) alternates elected by the Board of Directors; and two (2) members and two (2) alternates elected by the Society. No member of the Society shall be eligible to serve consecutively for more than two (2) terms on the committee of nominations. The Chairman of the nominating committee shall be elected by the committee.

Section 2. The duties of the committee shall be to nominate officers and directors by an affirmative vote of the majority of the entire committee. The report of the committee shall be filed with the secretary at least thirty (30) days before the date of the annual meeting.

Section 3. Nominations for officers and directors made by the committee and filed with the secretary shall be mailed to the members of the Society with the notice of the annual meeting.

Section 4. Nominations may be made from the floor at the annual meeting. Voting shall be by written ballot except when there is but one candidate for the office. The ballots shall be tabulated at the annual meeting and results announced.

Section 5. Consent of nominees proposed by the committee or nominated by members shall have been granted.

ARTICLE XI - MISCELLANEOUS

Section 1. On all questions of parliamentary procedure, Robert's Rules of Order shall prevail.

Section 2. The office of the Society shall be maintained in the City of La Mesa or such location as the Board of Directors may designate from time to time.



LA MESA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.  
Statement of Receipts and Disbursements  
July 1, 1982 to June 30, 1983

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	<u>July 1, 1982</u> <u>June 30, 1983</u>	<u>1982-1983</u> <u>Budget</u>
Cash Balance, beginning of period	\$ 2,655	
<u>Receipts</u>		
1. Membership Dues	\$ 2,253	\$ 2,500
2. Fund Raising	762	1,200
3. Ice Cream Social	1,591	1,200
4. Quilters	423	1,000
5. Yard Sale	382	400
6. Tours	166	100
7. M. M. Donations	600	540
8. Photo Collection Sales		60
9. Donations	<u>167</u>	
Total Receipts	<u>\$ 6,344</u>	<u>\$ 7,000</u>
<u>Disbursements</u>		
10. Mortgage Payable (J.M.)	\$ 1,956	\$ 1,956
11. Mortgage Payable (D.M.)	540	540
12. Mortgage Payable (M.M.)	540	540
13. Postage	281	300
14. Supplies & Miscellaneous	926	400
15. Museum Restoration	336	600
16. Insurance	726	600
17. Preservation Photos	223	300
18. Preservation of Collection		100
19. Newsletter	432	500
20. Oral History	42	100
21. Yard Maintenance	196	200
22. Contingency	1	64
23. Utilities	<u>602</u>	<u>800</u>
Total Disbursements	<u>\$ 6,801</u>	<u>\$ 7,000</u>
Cash Balance, end of period	<u>\$ 2,198</u>	

Statement of Financial Position  
June 30, 1983

<u>Assets</u>	
Cash in bank - Regular	\$ 2,198
*Cash in bank - Savings - Restricted	880
Cash in bank - Savings - Reserved	1,071
*Certificate of Deposit	2,035
Museum Building	59,333
Organization Costs	63
Total Assets:	<u>\$65,580</u>
<u>Liabilities</u>	
Mortgage Payable - First	\$22,127
Mortgage Payable - Second	7,016
Total Liabilities	<u>\$29,143</u>
<u>Equity</u>	
*Restricted	\$ 2,915
Unrestricted	<u>33,522</u>
	<u>\$36,437</u>

## MAKING MOVIES IN LA MESA

### THE AMERICAN FILM MANUFACTURING COMPANY 1911-1912

For eleven months in 1911 and 1912, the small community of La Mesa played a part in the early motion picture industry.

Following their first commercial exhibition in America in 1896, motion pictures developed rapidly as a popular entertainment; it has been estimated that by 1908 there were over 6,000 movie theaters in the country. Although most early film companies were on the East Coast, by 1910 the migration to Southern California that was shortly to make Hollywood the center of the film industry had already begun. The dependable, abundant sunshine and varied scenery would ultimately prove to be the reasons for the move, but at the time some companies were also prompted by a desire to be beyond the reach of the Motion Picture Patents Company. The Patents Company, an association of several of the major motion picture companies, tried to monopolize the industry through the patents it held on cameras and projectors. Independent companies that attempted to oppose the Patents Company often found themselves facing not only legal action but the destruction of property and equipment by hired thugs.

One of these independent companies was the Chicago-based American Film Manufacturing Company, also known by its symbol as Flying A. Soon after its formation in 1910, American sent a production company to the West Coast to make westerns. Early in 1911, twenty-six-year-old Allan Dwan, scenario editor for American, came to California to join the production unit. As Dwan later recounted in an interview (Peter Bogdanovich, Allan Dwan: The Last Pioneer), he found the company in San Juan Capistrano without a director. "It looked like a pretty sad situation and I wired the Chicago office, 'I suggest you disband the company. You have no director.' They wired back, 'You direct.' So I got the actors together and said, 'Now, either I'm a director or you're out of work.' And they said, 'You're the best damn director we ever saw. You're great.' I said, 'What do I do? What does a director do?' So they

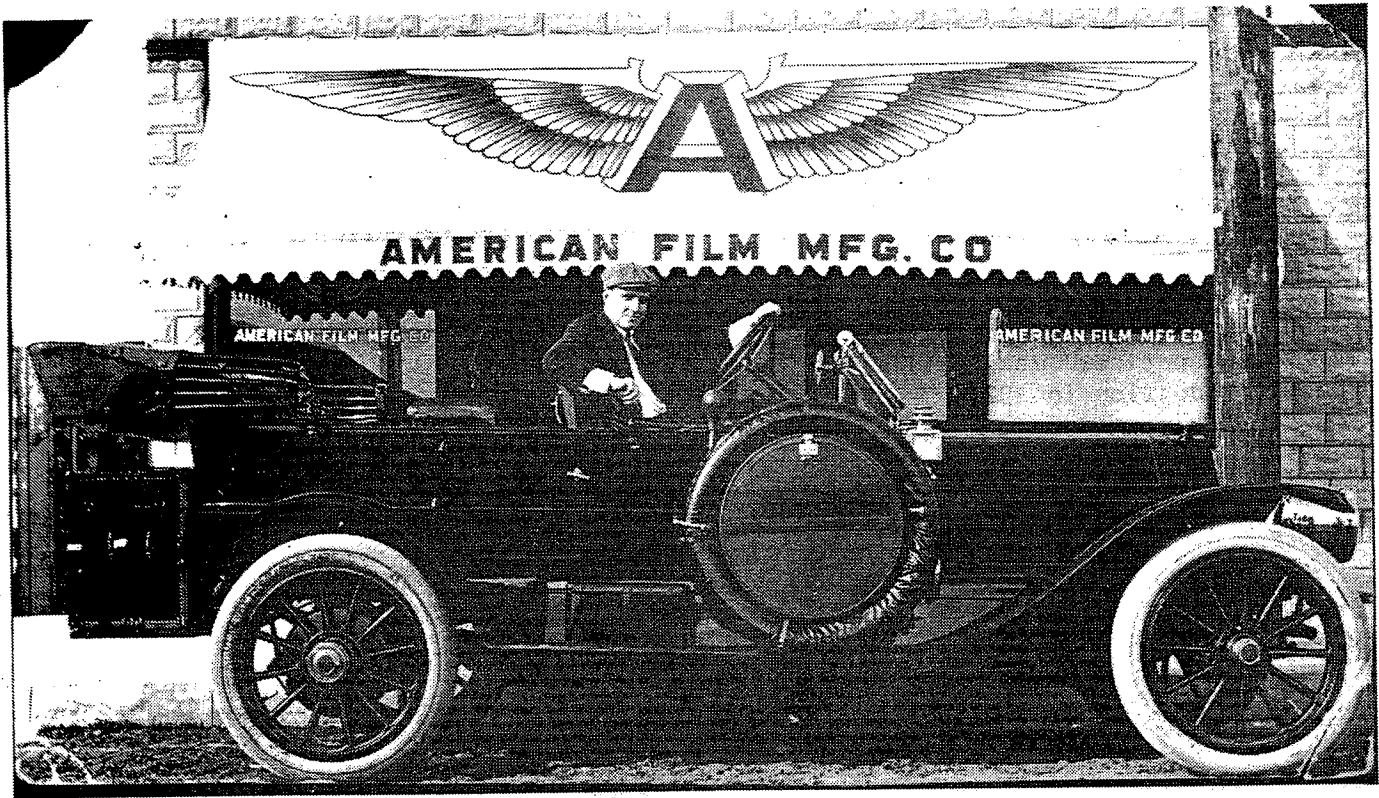
After a brief stay in San Juan Capistrano, director Dwan and the company moved to Lakeside, California, where in the space of four months they made forty films. These included The Yiddisher Cowboy, The Poisoned Flume, and Three Million Dollars.

A lack of extras in Lakeside prompted a second move, this time to La Mesa. The August 10, 1911 San Diego Union described the preparations underway for the imminent arrival of the film company. For use as a studio, Dwan leased the Wolff Building, a new twenty-five-foot wide store building on the north side of Lookout Avenue (now La Mesa Boulevard) where Third Street dead ends. Soon the interior was subdivided into offices and rooms for developing, drying, and finishing film. A vacant lot next door was leased for the construction of an open air stage for filming "interior" and exterior shots. The production company, a troupe of about twenty-five actors, cowboys, and cameramen and other technicians, found lodging in local homes. A corral on Date Avenue was leased for the fifteen saddle horses.

During the eleven months that the Flying A Company remained in La Mesa, Allan Dwan wrote and directed over one hundred films, among them The Trail of the Eucalyptus, The Winning of La Mesa, The Cowboy Socialist, Justice of the Sage, and The Land Baron of San Tee. All of these were the one-reel films popular at the time, each lasting about fifteen minutes. Most of them were westerns, but several were contemporary social comedies, or local documentaries such as The Caves of La Jolla.

The open countryside around La Mesa served as the background for most of the films. Local features used included the flume, depot, railroad, packing house, and various ranches. Love and Lemons showed scenes of La Mesa's lemon industry; Where Broadway Meets the Mountains was set at the Grossmont Inn.

Each week the Flying A company spent three days shooting two one-reel pictures



San Diego Historical Society  
Title Insurance & Trust Collection

Director Allan Dwan in front of American's La Mesa studio, c. 1912

duplication and distribution to theaters. Movie making at this time required little planning, and the site itself often suggested part of the plot. Allan Dwan later described a typical day's filming in the Lakeside and La Mesa areas: "I'd pile everyone into two buckboards, a ranch wagon for our equipment, the cowboys on their horses--the actors too if they were riding in the picture--and off we went into the country to make a picture. On the way out, I'd try to contrive something to do. I'd see a cliff or something of the sort. I had a heavy named Jack Richardson, so we'd send J. Warren Kerrigan, the leading man, up there to struggle with Richardson and throw him off the cliff. Now, having made the last scene of the picture, I had to go backwards and try to figure out why all this happened."

The cast for these films usually included J. Warren Kerrigan (leading man), who starred in movies of the 1920's; Pauline Bush (leading lady), who became Allan Dwan's wife; Jack Richardson (heavy); and Marshall Neilan (juvenile lead), later a director

A few La Mesa residents found employment with the company. Susanna Snook Bowman worked as a technician, cutting and splicing the film; her husband, Orville, served as a handyman. The Bowmans went with American to Santa Barbara after it left La Mesa. Dan Woodman joined the company as an actor.

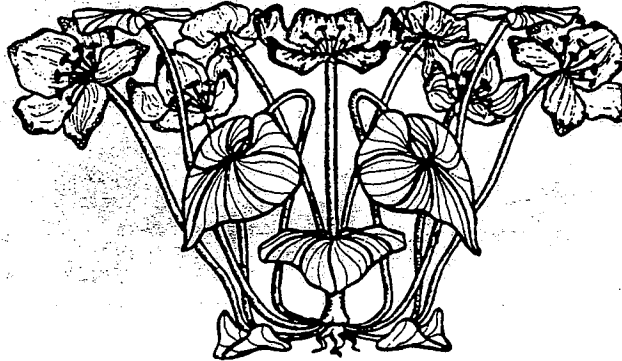
Mindful of possible trouble from the Motion Picture Patents Company, Dwan and his cowboys were armed when working. Sentries were posted to protect the valuable cameras from snipers. Only once, however, was there a threat from the Patents Company. As Dwan recalled: "One day in La Mesa a rough-looking character got off the train and looked me up. He said he was sent out to make sure me and my company got out of there and quit making pictures. Well, we took a walk up the road to talk it over. I hadn't been out of college for too long and was in good physical shape. So I wanted to get him far enough out of town to see if I couldn't beat his brains out. We stopped at a bridge over an arroyo where people had thrown some tin cans. There was a bright one sitting out there, so to impress

holster and shot at the can and missed it by about five yards. I pulled out my gun and hit the can twice, and that afternoon he left town. Also he was accompanied to the depot by my well-armed cowboys. From that time on we were never molested."

La Mesa's encounter with the early film industry proved to be of short duration. By July, 1912, Allan Dwan had run out of fresh background scenery, so he moved the company to Santa Barbara. There the American Film Company built a large studio facility and continued making films until it ceased production in 1921.

Allan Dwan's early experiences with the American Film Company provided the foundation on which he built a career. Dwan went on to become a major Hollywood director whose films included Robin Hood, with Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.; Heidi, with Shirley Temple; and The Sands of Iwo Jima, with John Wayne. During a career of over fifty years he directed at least 400 pictures and wrote or supervised as many more.

-Donna Regan



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