

La Mesa Historical Society LOOKOUT AVENUE

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Fellow Citizens, we cannot escape history. Abraham Lincoln

Spring, 2012

The City's Centennial: an Historical Opportunity

On February 16, 2012 the City of La Mesa turned 100 years old. The City and its Centennial Committee, composed of local residents, business and civic leaders formally kicked off the yearlong celebration through a series of public events after three years of extensive planning efforts. (*See President Aaron Landau's current article, visit our website and watch future issues of Lookout Avenue for Society-sponsored Centennial events*).

Civic or community anniversaries are renowned for enhancing interest in local history. Looking into the historiography of American local history many scholars track its formal origins; and that of many historical societies, to the U.S. Centennial Celebration of 1876.

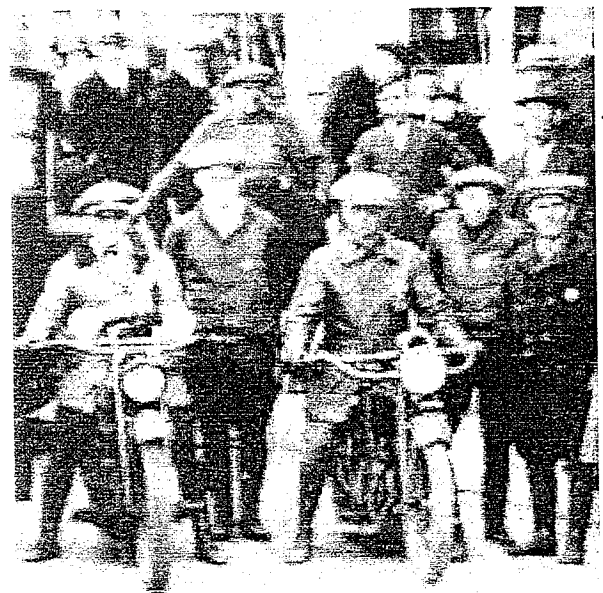
Civic leaders, promoters and boosters also participated in supporting community heritage, using local history—sometimes interchanging it with myth—to promote their community's interests as well as inspiring the popular fashion a century ago for civic historical pageants. San Diego's Cabrillo Festival being a local example.

Although the historical pageant heyday would be over by World War II, the inspirational value of such anniversary events hits home with our own organization.

The 1976 U.S. Bicentennial was one motivating factor for the establishment of the La Mesa Historical Society the year prior. The Bicentennial is considered a major catalyst for the proliferation

of local history, historic preservation and historical organizations nationally.

Subsequently professional historians, including myself, received special training for entering the local history, museum, and cultural resource fields as applied or "public" historians. We bring with us not only the historical methodology for critical research and analysis, but also the scholarly trends that were expanding the history discipline, most notably "social history" with its focus on the study of the working classes, women, ethnic and racial minorities and the disenfranchised.



La Mesa PD Roars into 20th Century

These new historical trends and methods helped expand the "traditional" approach of local history beyond narratives of civic progress, promotion and boosterism, illustrated with the biographies of local leaders, heroes and celebrities.

Local historians now added the diverse stories of those that had often been left out of traditional narratives and in doing so engaged the entire community, uncovering hidden aspects of its collective history.

These opportunities to expand and improve our understanding of our own local history are at the core of the Centennial's value to us.

For myself, the Centennial has presented an opportunity to re-examine some of the existing historical scholarship as well as delve into subjects yet to be researched. (*My March 17th lecture on the City's Incorporation and other recent stories are available at:*

<http://lamesa.patch.com/search/articles?cat=1998198867&contributor=50369>).

Our Society's founders and predecessors have established a proud tradition. Their initial focus on capturing the stories, archives and objects of the community's pioneers is the foundation we stand on today.

Yet increasingly we get new inquiries about the La Mesa of the 1950s to 1970s. This rising interest makes great sense when you remember that the City and environs experienced exponential population growth during these decades.

So "historic La Mesa" isn't just about those who can trace their lineage back to the 700 residents of 1912 or before, but also about the many tens of thousands more that were "pioneers" of Post-War La Mesa – all with similar fond memories and fascinating, and sometimes heart-wrenching, stories of our community in those vibrant times.

Therefore, we need not only consider expansion of our mission's scope chronologically, but also geographically. For as the **City** turns 100, we all recognize that the history and community of "La Mesa" extends beyond the city limits. Residents of San Carlos, Fletcher Hills, Grossmont, Mt. Helix, Spring Valley, Lemon Grove or Rolando and the College Area all have connections to **our** collective histories.

It is this "visible" opportunity to gather, preserve, promote, and illuminate La Mesa's various collective histories—for new and perhaps larger constituencies—and in new and innovative ways—that will likely be the most lasting value of our City's birthday in 2012.

So although it is easy to get drawn into the hoopla and hype of the "Party of the Century" for our beloved hometown (both she and we surely deserve it!), it is also important for us at the Historical Society to re-focus and re-invest in our still valid mission: to collect and preserve, to inspire and educate, while sharing the unfolding story of La Mesa.

by James D. Newland
1st Vice President, LMHS

More History for Moree People than You Might Think?

There are more museums in the US than there are McDonald's restaurants or Starbucks cafés. American museums receive more than 850 million visits a year, more than all professional sporting events and theme parks combined.

This was the unexpected – and little known – finding of the 2009 edition of the American Association of Museum's triennial survey *Museum Financial Information*.

An excerpt from *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen drives home the significance of the AAM's survey data.

The two historians report that "*When asked what sources of their knowledge of the past they most trust, Americans put museums and historic sites first – ahead of grandparents, eyewitnesses, college professors, history books, movies, television programming, and high school history classes.*"



"Histerical" Thoughts

Aaron Landau,
LMHS President

La Mesa Turns 100; LMHS Burns Brightly

The long awaited, much planned City of La Mesa Centennial Celebration is here and happening. February 14th was the kickoff. Events are planned on an ongoing basis throughout this calendar year, culminating in January 2013 with a "Party of the Century" Gala.

The La Mesa Historical Society is actively involved in "La Mesa 2012." Our participation during the lead up to, and the arrival of, the city's 100th birthday raised the prominence and stature of our organization. With the promotion of La Mesa's centennial celebration, the Society experienced increased exposure across the community. As a direct result, we have added new members and volunteers.

As an organization that is now into its fourth decade, we have a well-established community presence and involvement. This yearlong event re-emphasizes the significance of our mission to collect and preserve La Mesa's history, for the education and enjoyment of a much broader community audience.

This includes the efforts to update our object collections inventory—a monumental task undertaken by Donna Niemeier, Linda Rankin, Pat Stromberg, Penny Brawner, and Joan Semler. They as a group have already logged countless hours methodically and patiently going through our object collections bequeathed to us since our inception in 1975. They have accounted for, and in some cases, "re-discovered" the numerous interesting, unique, and informative collections

that are stored and displayed in the McKinney House and Society archives building.

The Palermo Building, which stores our archival material, has been quite a draw as well of late with the higher profile of our "town's" history. Donna and Jim Newland have been assisting those who come by with queries regarding the history of their homes and businesses. We also have been receiving increased e-mail correspondence and attention from our community's various new "journalistic ventures."

We should all be proud of what the LMHS has achieved over the years and is continuing to do on a regular basis. Your membership allows us to "be all that we can be" in meeting our mission. If you would like to "upgrade" your participation level in the Society, we are always looking for more volunteers in various capacities. Please spread the word about your organization. Encourage friends to join. We are aiming for a roster with at least 300 members in 2012. We are currently at 244. Together, we can get there.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead, anthropologist

On Board: Rod Whitlow

Rod Whitlow is a numbers guy. He's no slouch as a conversationalist. But on some subjects he'd rather the numbers do the talking. As treasurer, Rod keeps a gimlet eye on the Society's numbers. And the story they tell – summarized in his annual report - is good.

A La Mesa resident since 1976, Rod is a happily retired accountant. He joined Society in 2006 and soon assumed responsibility for the Treasury. The biggest challenge for the treasurer, he says, is process – making sure that the audit trails are clear. Today they are and the Society is in excellent financial shape.

Rod does not have a public history background per se, but share's with wife Linda Rankin a keen appreciation for antiques and for old buildings in particular. They live just three blocks from the area of La Mesa they most enjoy – The Village. Among the Society's programs, Rod admires the annual Home Tour for putting "the Society out there, in the public eye in a very positive way."

Rod and Linda are both enthusiastic about the Centennial, wishing there could be a prominent event, somewhere in La Mesa, every month. Rod regrets that the Society was unable to nudge the City into a more proactive stance early on. He senses some lost opportunities, but he is equally quick to note the unflagging efforts of Board colleagues, Donna Niemeier, Aaron Landau and Jim Newland. And he is especially proud of the Society's new portable photographic exhibit.

While lauding the Society's efforts on the Historic Preservation Committee, Rod wishes that body's recommendations had more teeth – equal to the Design Review Board, consequently giving the Society's input to the planning process more clout.

Setting solemn spreadsheets aside, Rod lives for musical theater, especially great, rollicking Gilbert and Sullivan-like productions. The beneficiary of Rod's affection is Lyric Opera of San Diego, owner of the landmark Birch North Park Theater (1928) at University and 28th. Rod is, naturally, treasurer.



Historic Birch North Park Theater

When not crunching the numbers, Rod is often seen holding a boarding pass at Lindbergh. In 2010, he and Linda toured the Eastern

Mediterranean. Last year they explored China, with extensive land and river segments. As Lookout Avenue goes to press, they are packing for a month in South Africa, with an excursion to Rwanda and Jane Goodall territory.



Rod consults a Taormina authority on the local vintage

Looking forward, Rod hopes the Society will undertake a large, visionary project, such as acquisition of a larger historic property – A central location that could better accommodate the Society's education programs.

Rod believes the Society could do more to market itself and its mission – which is not widely understood. There's room, he says, to make a better case for local history and to keep the city's distinctive elements alive and healthy.

Where to start? Perhaps through broader distribution of *Lookout Avenue* – with "take away" copies available at locations along its namesake: Lookout Avenue.

"Knowing where you have come from is important in forming an idea of where you want to go."

Alexander Stille, author and journalist

In the Spotlight:

Allyson Kinnard

Associate Planner, City of La Mesa

Some folks always have a plan. It may be Plan A or Plan B, but there's a plan. Associate City Planner Allyson Kinnard is one of those people. Allyson's plan began with an early interest in historic preservation, a fascination strong enough to span both coasts.

A native of Virginia, Allyson grew up in the Tidewater area around Newport News. She took a double major (Historic Preservation and American Studies) at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, then went on to earn a master's degree in the College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, at the University of Delaware. Her specialization: Historic Preservation.

Mindful of her plans to move west, Allyson's graduate advisor adjusted the traditional East Coast curriculum, tailoring her program with architecture and issues more common beyond the Mississippi. Parchment in hand, Allyson headed for La Mesa and soon joined the team at City Hall.

The City's Associate Planner carries a full portfolio, but Allyson relishes the variety of projects, each day bringing a different challenge. This year she is contributing to the City's General Plan Update with responsibility for three individual elements and oversight of contracts with multiple consultants.

Closer to her heart is representing the City's Community Development Department on the Historic Preservation Commission. Allyson describes the Commission as simply "good people, doing good work" readily acknowledging the pleasure of serving with them.

Among comparable cities, La Mesa is in the middle of the pack with respect to the stewardship of historical properties. But that description masks a remarkable achievement. Over the past 12 years, registered Historic Landmarks in La Mesa grew from 15 to nearly 40, a pace that added roughly

two per year. Allyson credits the Commission and of course the property owners themselves.

A steadfast supporter of the Historical Society, Allyson appreciates the energy, the can-do attitude and the sense of purpose among people she meets there. She singles out Past-President Donna Niemeier's current project to sort, assess, catalog and preserve the Society's archives as particularly noteworthy and valuable.



Allyson Kinnard

The epitome of cool-headed professionalism, Allyson is pure passion when talk turns to preserving vulnerable records, pictures and maps. She hopes that one enduring legacy of the Centennial year will be heightened awareness of the importance of preserving source documents. "I see the buzz surrounding the Centennial as an opportunity for LMHS to raise awareness about the importance of preserving fragile and irreplaceable records and to raise funds to implement such programs," she says.

Doing work one loves is easy. The hard part Allyson shares with working parents everywhere – striking the right balance between a professional career and the joys in her life: her children. The Kinnards love to explore new places, travelling to the National Parks or destinations with zoos and science museums as often as possible.

The family lives in and loves La Mesa. Their favorite part? The Village. A walk through

"downtown" is a must-do for East Coast visitors, who are unanimous in their enjoyment of the diversity, the intimacy and that special, hard-to-define vibe.

So, what's the plan now?

Allyson smiles at the question. There is a plan. The Kinnards' dream is to live in an old house. How old? Well, not a log cabin, but maybe old enough to remember the days of incorporation. A perfect plan for life in La Mesa.

A Step Back in Time...

Come make a visit to the LMHS's McKinney House. We are featuring a new room display showcasing the history of old-time toys and games from tiddlywinks, to spinning tops, tin wind-up toys, checkers, jacks, marbles, a kaleidoscope and many more to tantalize your memory.



All of these items are displayed in a classroom setting with old photos of students from Allison Street School and La Mesa Grammar School between 1910 and 1929. Perhaps you will recognize a relative from the past.

Bring your children, grandchildren, neighbors and friends to share *a step back in time*. The McKinney House is open from 1-4 PM, the second and fourth Saturdays of each month for guided tours. Call to confirm: 619-466-0197.

Historical Society News: www.lamesahistory.com

A Special Welcome for the Society's New Members

Glenna A. Bloeman
Henry Garrett
Gordon W. Hoard
Larry and Carolyn Kaiser
Linda Major
Cindy Miles
Joan Semler

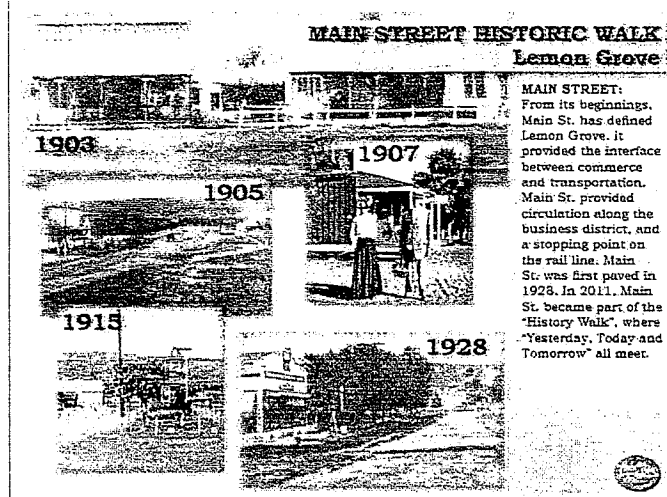
One Hill Over: Local History at Work in Lemon Grove

Lemon Grove's Main Street Promenade is poised to break ground this month. Three years in planning, the project is funded by a smart-growth grant from the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). With redevelopment agencies slated to close, it's one of the last redevelopment projects scheduled for our area.

The theme for the project is "*Where Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow Meet*," a celebration of the city's heritage with a look to its future. The Lemon Grove Historical Society opened its archives and shared resources with the city and project contractors, including lead artists Robin Brailsford and Wick Alexander.

The result is a pedestrian-friendly design with elements to delight and inform strollers of all ages. The "historic walk" installation uses selected photographs to illustrate the Lemon Grove story through its civic buildings, transportation facilities and agriculture. The story continues with a montage of images on display around the modern trolley depot.

For the Historical Society, close collaboration with Brailsford and Alexander struck a powerful chord as the artists fashioned substance and whimsy into new forms that give the Society's collections a fresh lease on life.



They examined crocks once used to brine local olives, the now iconic lug labels on lemon crates, the central role of the rail line, and evidence of the chronic challenge of water, each story element finding its proper expression in the whole.

Society President Helen Ofield describes the project as "urban planning at its best, bringing together a dedicated and visionary city staff and a motivated city council with creative professionals in architecture, landscape design, and public art (to create a space) that reflects not only a noble agrarian past, but present reality and future hopes and dreams."

For a colorful graphic of the Promenade plan, visit the city's site at <http://www.ci.lemon-grove.ca.us>

Is the Participatory Museum the Wave of the Future?

Visitor participation is a hot topic in the contemporary world of museums, art galleries, science centers, libraries and cultural organizations. *The Participatory Museum* is a practical guide to working with community members and visitors to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places. Author Nina Simon is an exhibit designer, museum consultant, and the creative spark behind the highly regarded Museum 2.0 blog, which also appears as a column in *Museum* magazine.

Simon's book is recommended reading for organizations interested in experimenting with audience participation on the one hand and cautious about upending the tradition museum model on the other. Concentrating on the practical, the book is appropriate for monster and miniature museums (and those in between) that seek to break down barriers to new audiences.

International museum guru Elaine Gurian notes that Simon's concentration on the practical, particularly her description of the philosophy and rationale behind participatory activity, makes clear that action does not always require new technology or machinery. "Museums need to change, are changing, and will change further in the future," Gurian writes.

Eric Siegel, Director of the New York Hall of Science is equally enthusiastic. "As I read this book, there were about 20 times when I thought 'we should try this!'" Siegel says.

More creative thinking on Simon's blogsite <http://www.museumtwo.blogspot.com/>

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	Linda Rankin
	Pat Stromberg
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Past President	Donna Niemeier

Board meetings are held the second Monday of each month at 7:00 PM.

Lookout Avenue is the quarterly publication of the La Mesa Historical Society.

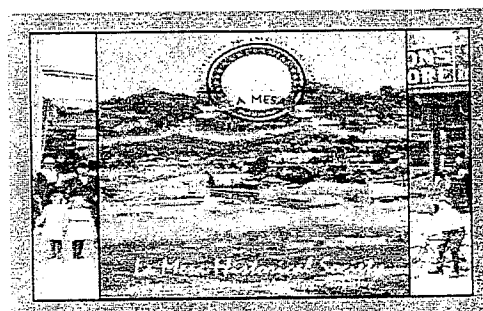
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Change Service Requested



LMHS Centennial Calendar

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
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- ☐ \$5 Student

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

- ☐ Docent/Education
- ☐ Events

- ☐ Grounds/Building
- ☐ Archives/House