

Volume 37, Issue 1

Fellow Citizens, we cannot escape history. Abraham Lincoln

Winter, 2012

The Drows: A Centennial Family

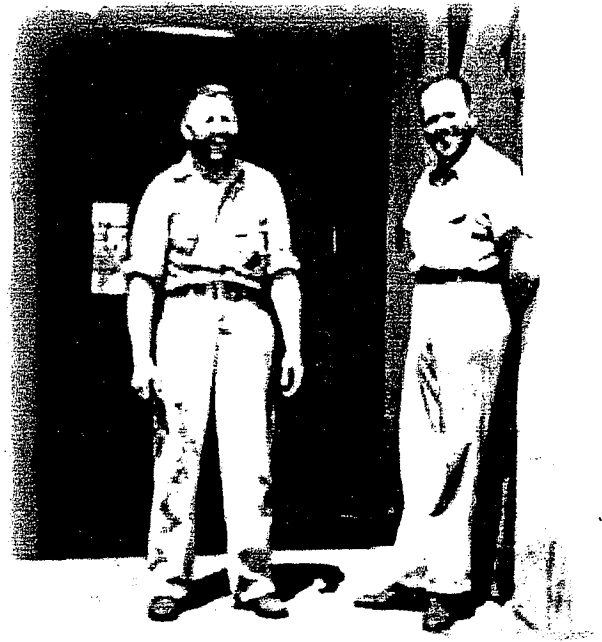
The Drows have a long history on the Pacific coast. It starts in Seattle, moves to San Francisco and eventually brings them to the new City of La Mesa. The year was 1912. Elmer Drew was just 7.

Graduating with the first class from Grossmont High, Elmer worked a number of jobs around town, as did most of the young men in the city. In 1927, he started an auto repair business on the north side of Lookout Avenue. The sole employee he worked steadily, keeping a bed upstairs to be on call for customer emergencies.



Drew's Garage on Lookout Avenue

The Depression hit hard. In 1934 the Ford Dealership down the street folded. Drew was offered the opportunity, but cannily declined. The best part of the failed business soon walked up Lookout to his door. It was the head mechanic Wallace Todd, carrying only his reputation and his prized Ford wall clock.



Wallace Todd and Elmer Drew, early 1940s

Ford Motor's factory representative noticed and soon Elmer had a second offer, sweetened with a demonstrator car. He took it and launched a new dealership. There were roughly 20 Ford dealers in the county at that time, success never certain.

After Pearl Harbor, war production was paramount; during 1942-45 consumers took a back seat. Many auto lots looked like junk yards. Elmer sold tires, serviced cars and drove a truck. It was a difficult time, but Drew Ford survived.

Postwar prosperity meant high demand; locally the Drew "brand" was solid. Elmer's son Joe joined the firm and together they built a thriving, full-

service automobile business. The dealership soon dominated the corner of La Mesa Boulevard and Allison – the space now occupied by Village newcomer, Gingham.

In 1964, Joe Drew took his wife to the World's Fair at Flushing Meadows outside New York City. Ford Motors created a visually dramatic pavilion to introduce the Mustang. The Drews were smitten. By 1967, La Mesa and East County had a new landmark: The Roundhouse at Drew Ford.



The 1964 World's Fair. Photo courtesy of Doug Coldwell,

The distinctive building was a huge draw. La Mesa felt modern. From the late 1960s into the early 1980s, the Roundhouse was a preferred venue for special events. True to their school, the Drews even hosted Foothiller dances.

The dealership went from success to success, expanding operations to cover 15 acres, adding two franchises (Volkswagen and Hyundai) building a professional team of 270 employees and not least, passing the baton to the third generation, with Bill Drew now at the helm.

Along the way Drew Ford won recognition as a TIME Magazine Dealer of the Year. One of the most coveted awards in the industry, it comes

with a steep requirement for community service. The Drews were equal to it – and then some. Long a dependable civic partner, Drew Ford supports activities that are germane to its business (Historic Highway 80) and others that simply reflect the firm's sense of citizenship.

What would Elmer Drew make of La Mesa's Centennial? Not much, says Bill, he preferred to look toward tomorrow, rather than yesterday. But with Bill's guidance the firm takes a more expansive view and Drew Ford is a committed centennial sponsor. 1912 is not just another date. For the Drews, roots make a difference.



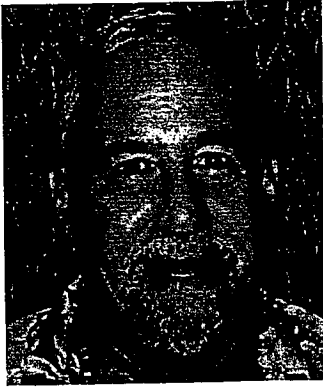
Again, the Torch Passes: Joe and Bill Drew

With wide ranging interests outside the business, (family, hiking, camping and motorcycles) Bill is quick to applaud the Society's preservation efforts. The firm's own centennial looms on the horizon and Drew Ford awaits its historian. The archives are there, Bill affirms, and intact.

But for the moment, the City's celebration is front and center. The Drew's are ready. And Wallace Todd's classic clock is ticking down the hours on the wall in the Parts Department.

"The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world."

Carl Becker in
Everyman His Own Historian



"Histerical" Thoughts

By Aaron Landau,
LMHS President

Welcome to 2012, La Mesa's centennial year! The City will kick off the official celebration at the Council meeting on February 14th, the exact day in 1912 that the community's new Board of Trustees met to elect a president and officers, while awaiting word of the state's review of the incorporation vote. Two days later, with the vote legally recorded, the City of La Mesa was born.

I am honored to represent the LMHS in this momentous year. The LMHS is ready for the centennial with many special events and projects in the works. These include a story contest for grade 3 and essay contest for grades 8 and 11 in our local schools. Others to watch for include a silent movie night, rotating historical photo exhibits, History Roundtable presentations at the Grossmont Health Care auditorium, geocaching events (Google it) and a La Mesa Authors Night at the library. Come on out and joint the fun – you may be surprised at how much there is to learn.

In the July 2011 issue, we had a blue page insert entitled LMHS Membership Survey. The mailed in surveys were collected and tabulated. Thanks to all of you who responded. Your input is much appreciated and beneficial.

What the Survey Said:

Events: The Society's Home Tour was number one in popularity, followed by our Roundtables. We had a few suggestions for future Roundtable topics including speakers on historical homes and a panel of long-time residents on growing up in La Mesa. There were also several recommendations for new events such as walking tours of La Mesa

highlighting historical buildings and other landmarks.

There were five suggestions for "Lookout Avenue" articles. Three members said they were willing to write an article for our newsletter. A few members said they were willing to become docents. Two other members said they would like to volunteer in some other capacity.

We will be looking into implementing the ideas generated through the survey as well as "signing up" those who expressed an interest in volunteering. For the Society, a busy 2012 is already underway. May your 2012 be full of joy, health and prosperity.

The LMHS 2011 Christmas Open House Raffle produced smiles for the winners:

Donna Alm, Jim & Jackie Bartelt, Kurt Bohnsack, Emy Center, Joanne & Dick Hoy, Pat Johnston, Fran Powers and Janet Rippinger.

Congratulations to them all !

On Board: Ruth Contino

LMHS Second Vice President and Membership Committee Chair, Ruth Contino, has a thing for old houses. While that is great for the Society, it keeps Ruth busy – and in some unexpected ways.

The fascination started early and runs in the family. Ruth grew up in a 1950's ranch-style home in Serra Mesa and just never got over the romance of old houses. Her sister shares the enthusiasm, which she channels into a successful business at the Ocean Beach Antique Mall.

Ruth's first experience with the issues and strategies in historic preservation came with membership in the Golden Hill Neighborhood Association. That led to a productive connection with the Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO) where she remains active as a supporting and participating member. When Ruth subsequently

moved to La Mesa, it wasn't long before she was one of the regulars at the LM Historical Society.



Ruth Contino and Schnitzel

When Ruth accepted the Society's Membership "portfolio" over 10 years ago, it arrived in a shoebox filled with 3X5 cards. Fortunately, her work at BAE Systems gave her the tools needed to bring the roster into the electronic age. Today membership records, mailing labels and the like are all computerized. But human nature still makes plenty of mischief; replacing "lost" renewal notices is a perpetual task.

An irrepressible volunteer, Ruth has now served at all of the Society's main public events, a source of particular enjoyment and satisfaction. Recalling people and special occasions over the years, she sums up the experience by saying "Our members are just great."

A member of the San Diego Cactus and Succulent Society, Ruth is a dedicated collector of cacti. Keeping always-curious best buddy Schnitzel out of the spines is a perennial challenge, but well worth the occasional alarm.

Today Ruth, husband Steve and Schnitzel are living the dream, tinkering and caring for their home, La Mesa's landmark Miles House. Designed by noted San Diego architect John B. Stannard, and built in 1909, the two-story Lucius Miles House is one of just a few surviving turn-of-the-century lemon ranches. Now stripped of the original 35 acres of lemon trees, the site still commands both east and west views from the Grossmont summit.

There is a "dark side" to Ruth's passion for old houses. She is a bona fide ghost hunter, with the equipment, the travel receipts and electronic images to prove it. Working with a fellow poltergeist hobbyist, Ruth has pursued the elusive spirits on investigative trips up to San Francisco and Virginia City, over to the notorious Lizzie Borden house in Fall River, Massachusetts and down into the moss-draped atmosphere of Savannah, Georgia. Historical hotels are almost always irresistible and promising locations. The most "haunted"? By a wide margin, the historic Cunard liner, RMS Queen Mary. *Caveat viator.*

In this centennial year, Ruth hopes La Mesans will undertake to learn more about the history of our town and its many intriguing features, such as the stairways that run up and down the Windsor Hills - and of course, the houses. Always the houses.

A Special Welcome for the Society's New Members

Nina J. Babiarz
Barbara Balaban
Jim & Jackie Bartelt
Jo-Ann & Brad Boswell
Steven Churchill
Pam & Ted Crooks
George Fahouris
James Fifle & Marilyn Hundley
Richard & Kelly Forman
Joseph F. Glidden
James Hughes
Jeff Kieve & Vincent Ursillo
Carol & Dick Millard
Rob McDonald & Linda Dentice
James & Suzanne McHenry
Virginia McKenzie
Gene Vicino & Paul Turro
Debbie White
Cissy Walters
Sue Zatorski

In the Spotlight: Helen Ofield ***President, Lemon Grove*** ***Historical Society***

How much difference can one person make? The accomplishments of civic activist and veteran historic preservationist Helen Ofield offer a clue.

The President of the Lemon Grove Historical Society is a writer/narrator for television and film currently at work on a biography of General Baron Von Steuben, while assisting husband Jack Ofield, SDSU's Filmmaker in Residence, on various productions. That's the day job.

The real work happens on the margins. It began in the 1970's, in the Hudson River Valley, during the run-up to the US Bicentennial celebrations. The rapid loss of priceless Revolutionary-era heritage sites in the Valley moved Ofield to act. "The makings of history are all around us," she realized, "but it is up to us to make something of them."

The National Trust, established in 1949, did not provide the outreach and professional guidance it does today. Ken Burns had not yet mesmerized us (and inspired donors) by unspooling a fresh look at America's past directly into our family rooms. Undaunted, Ofield's small band learned the art of preservation by doing it. One property at a time.

Today the New York State Register of Historic Places includes the 1846 Church of St John the Evangelist, the 1853 Rensselaer Reynolds House, the 1888 Joshua Reynolds House and the 1885 Mortimer Evans House. These early efforts put a permanent stamp on Ofield's life and ignited a passion that burns undimmed.

When the Ofield's arrived in Lemon Grove in early 1982, the "Pasadena of San Diego" was stirring. Having survived La Mesa's 1956 annexation gambit, the City of Lemon Grove achieved incorporation in 1977 – on the fourth attempt.

The Lemon Grove Historical Society – whose founding members had gathered materials for several years – organized formally in 1978, with 246 charter members. But enthusiasm waned as

the Society weathered the challenges and competition faced by all non-profits in the 1980's.

The catalyst for renewal came from an unlikely source: the long-awaited construction of Highway 125. By 1990, it was clear the route would plow straight through one of Lemon Grove's historic neighborhoods. Near the summit of Palm Street the stately 1928 Tudor Revival H. Lee House presided; below, the yellow earthmovers roared.

The Campaign for the Lee House required more than 10 years. Federal, state and local agencies and personalities had to be reconciled. Civic alliances formed; the sympathetic ear of Mayor Dr. Robert Burns was indispensable. Today the relocated house anchors a new "civic campus" in the heart of the town's original footprint.



Helen Ofield

Lessons learned during the campaign were not lost. In 1995, the Lemon Grove Council undertook a major revision of the General Plan. Ofield volunteered, earning the Society a place at the table. She championed the idea that preservation and urban planning were compatible – and the Society a capable partner.

The 1996 -1999 joint project to rehabilitate the 1897 Atherton Chapel as the Parsonage Museum made her point. Saving the city's first church had tremendous emotional impact, galvanizing the Society in the final push to complete restoration of the H. Lee House. And, it cemented Ofield's belief that preservation must serve a higher purpose.

After decades in the trenches, Ofield appreciates the craft, often sublime, in America's historical buildings. But her vision is remarkably uncluttered by romanticism or sentimentality. Beyond simple antiquarian interest, she says, there must be some larger reason for saving a particular artifact, building or site.

For Ofield, heritage stewardship is much like being a parent – the concern never really ends. One is always, in some way, “on the job.”

Ofield has no patience for architectural “facadism” and other negotiated dodges in the civic realm. “We have not come all this way from the Sumerians,” she says, “in order to declare that the tangible evidence of our history should be bulldozed for short term commercial gain.”

This matters, Ofield observes, because at every stage of their lives people seek understanding. They need context and they want meaning. Local history can provide all three. Moreover, we are living it. Close up and concrete, it is who we are.

Ofield laments the scarcity of joint programming among the region's historical societies, but is heartened by the success of the Congress of History's annual March conferences. The quality of the programs and public response augur well.

On the board of the Historical Society since 1996 and the San Diego County Historic Site Board since 2007, Ofield still found time to co-author, with Pete Smith, the pictorial history *Lemon Grove* in the Images of America series.

What's next? The Society is digitizing 52 years of the *Lemon Grove Review* weekly newspaper, a rich source of the community's history. Ofield is now recalling key episodes from that archive in her regular columns for *Lemon Grove Patch.com*.

So, yes. One person, on the job, can make one whale of a difference.

*“If you don't know history, you don't know anything.
You're a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree.”*

“Timeline” by Michael Crichton

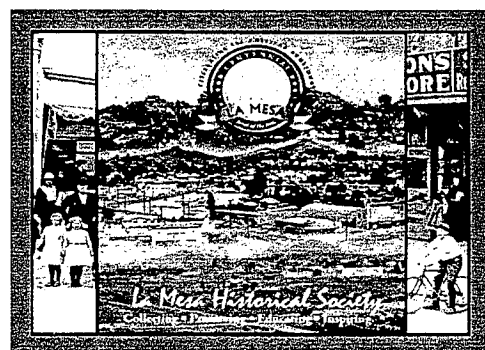
McKinney House Museum

Note New Tour Hours: The McKinney House Museum on University Avenue will be open for tours on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month, from 1-4 PM. Call to confirm: 619-466-0197.

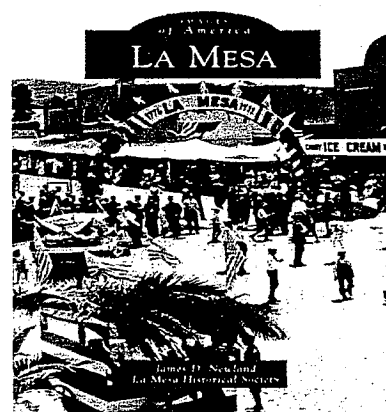
Historical Society News: www.lamesahistory.com

Special LMHS Gifts

The Society's 2012 Centennial Calendars are still on sale. A perfect “centennial” year gift.



LMHS Centennial Calendar



The limited edition illustrated history of the city by LMHS Vice President and local historian Jim Newland showcases over 200 vintage photos. Special signed copies are still available for just \$20. All royalties flow back to the Society.

Stop by the archives office behind the McKinney House Museum any Saturday afternoon between 1-4 PM. We are located at 8369 University Avenue.

Thinking about the Centennial?

Our national experience, beginning with the centennial of the Civil War closely followed by the American Bicentennial, suggests it is no easy thing to get the story right, find the balance between hoopla and substance, while satisfying diverse constituencies. The hurdles have spawned a growing literature.

We can learn from the spadework of others. The Civil War Centennial was first examined in C. Vann Woodward's 1961 essay "Reflections on a Centennial" and remains a contentious subject today. See Robert Cook's 2007 study *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965*, or David Blight's prize-winning 2001 volume *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, now a standard reference for framing the Sesquicentennial.

The hubris and the folly of the multi-national Columbian Quincentenary celebration were ably taken apart by: Stephen J. Summerhill and John A. Williams, *Sinking Columbus: Contested History, Cultural Politics, and Mythmaking*.

More generally, John R Gillis's 1994 volume *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* is still useful to our local purposes. David Lowenthal's *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* and his *The Past is a Foreign Country* are now minor classics for preservationists.

Sanford Levinson's *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* reminds us that commemorations are not just about the past, but about the present and the future as well.

Among the many cautionary accounts, the essays in Margaret MacMillan's *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* deserve our attention.

Granted, La Mesa's forthcoming celebration will play on a smaller stage. But we have a special obligation to get it right. Send your thoughts and suggestions for books, articles, films or programs on public commemoration. *Lookout Avenue* will share them with the Society's several audiences.

Mark your Calendars!

Congress of History's 47th Annual Conference

"From Inkwells to Internet: the History of Learning in the San Diego Region"

March 2nd and 3rd 2012

All sessions run 9:00am to 4:30pm (both days) in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences auditorium, the University of San Diego.

March 3rd: Jim Newland will speak on the history of the Grossmont Union HS District and the La Mesa Grammar School during the 1930's.

Registration fee is \$25 for both days, with special rates for seniors and students.

For further information visit the Congress of History website at www.congressofhistory.org

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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.

Please share story ideas, comments and suggestions with our Newsletter Editor

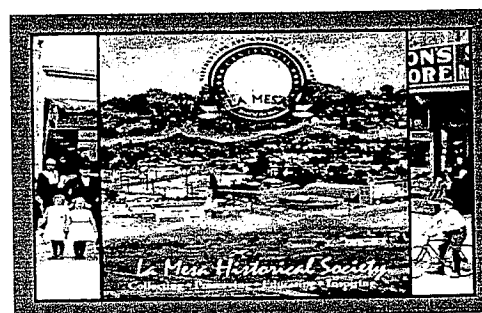
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LMHS Centennial Calendar

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
- ☐ \$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