



EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HERITAGE



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www.elcajonhistory.org

April 2017



A Sweet Time...

We had a great time at our quarterly meeting. We began with a tasty lunch at La Hacienda Restaurant, followed by Sue Bernabe's reminiscences of her early life in El Cajon. We then moved on to Le Caramel, the caramel factory owned by Sue and Philippe's daughter, Christen, and her husband, Vincent. We toured the factory, learning the nuances of cooking caramel, were treated to a taste of the delicious treats, and most of us carried some treasures home with us! Our many thanks to the Bernabes and Kugeners!

Up Next-Ancient Artifacts

For our next meeting, you can be one of the first to view a magnificent display of artifacts discovered recently at one of El Cajon's newest housing developments by Shea Homes. The Everly Homes development is located at Chase and Avocado, historically known as Granita Rancho. El Granito Springs quenched the thirsts of local and traveling Native American tribes for thousands of years.

You may remember the property in more recent times as a ranch and riding school, complete with the usual horses, ducks, chicken, and goats, as well as a couple less common ranch inhabitants- reindeer, and a camel named Jasmine! When excavating the property for the new development, an enormous trove of beautiful, ancient Kumeyaay artifacts were exposed. You can see these-and more-at the new Sycuan Cultural Resource Center and Museum. For more information and to reserve your spot, see the back page of this newsletter.



ECHS author and historian, Eldonna Lay with Paul Barnes, president of Shea Homes in San Diego, and the historic marker installed by Shea Homes to commemorate the adjacent ancient site of El Granito Springs. Photo by Mike Kaszuba-2015.

School Tours Abound!

The Knox House Museum's "School Tour Season" is in full swing!

By the end of April, over 300 third grade students and accompanying adults will have toured the Knox House Museum. In order to continue our school outreach and increase the number of tours available next year, the ECHS needs more volunteers to help with the tours. You do not have to be an expert on El Cajon's pioneer history -- you just have to be willing to talk about some of the items in the Knox House Museum. Our veteran docents are happy to show aspiring docents the ropes, and the society has a Docent Handbook to help you learn some of the specifics. Two of our newest docents, Terry Valverde and Sandy Schlom, "shadowed" veteran docents during a couple of school tours and have now dived in to help lead school tours. Please consider learning more about becoming a tour docent. If you have questions, please contact Becky Taylor by email (cruznbecky@cox.net) or phone (619-440-3069).





President's Message

My message for this edition is a thank-you to Carol Clarke, retired teacher from Cajon Valley School District, for her generous donation to the Society. This baby stroller (circa 1910) was not part of her family heritage. Its purchase from an El Cajon antique store in the 1980's was the result of her interest in history. She has given us permission to re-gift it to another museum if it doesn't fit into our collection. Many thanks, Carol!

This is how the stroller would have looked in its full glory. We do have the parasol and the arm to fasten it, but time has literally eaten away at the fabric. My research shows that it would have sold for about \$15 at that time.

Carla



Carol Clarke, pictured at the Knox House with the stroller.



Meet Joe Klock

You may already be familiar with Joe. I should have caught him with a string of red opportunity drawing tickets around his neck. That is how he helps at Quarterly Meetings.

His value to ECHS does not end there. He is an At Large member of the Board of Directors and functions as our liaison with George Dall, our Treasurer. He picks up mail from our Post Office box and brings it to me if there is something needing immediate attention. He is one of those people who do so many things they sometimes go unnoticed. May that end here! Please notice him and thank him for all he does.

Carla

Welcome New Member

✦ Gary E. Mitrovich



2017 EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Telephone Messages: 619-444-3800.

Those Dues Are Due

If you haven't already paid them, please help us by sending in your dues.

Membership dues for 2017 are:

\$12 for Individual, \$20 Family, \$30 Organization, \$40 Business, and \$500 Enhanced Life

(Life members never need to renew).

Please make checks payable to ECHS and send to P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973.

Thank you for your support of ECHS!

CHOLLAS HEIGHTS AND EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

by Jack Dickens

In the early 1800s, Southern California was hot and dry and known for its fleas. For example, the Las Pulgas off-ramp on Hwy 5 north of Oceanside is “the fleas”, translated from Spanish. This arid land required vast areas so as to have enough vegetation to feed the roaming cattle, the major local industry at that time. To bring value to the land was to bring water to it.

Throughout California, men over time had been mapping out the various lakes, streams, and valleys in the quest to identify this valuable resource. It was a matter of life or death for travelers who would need life-sustaining water as they moved through the wilderness. In what is present-day San Diego County, two local entrepreneurs were active in bringing water to dry land for speculation. They were John D. Spreckels and Edward Fletcher. A short distance to the east of the small city of San Diego was an elevated knoll suitable for a reservoir. North of that site and nearby was another area that could create a small lake. There were sources of water in the mountains to the east and to the south. The challenge was to bring the water to San Diego.

The Quest for Water

John D. Spreckels, of the sugar dynasty, began to invest in San Diego in the late 1800s. He was on the city council. He established a railroad from San Diego to the east that ran through Mexico and back into the United States to attach to the Southern Pacific Railroad at Plaster City. He also established a series of reservoirs in south San Diego County, and then pumped water north to an elevated knoll, Chollas Heights, in an area that is now known as College Grove. In 1905 he established a terminus reservoir at that site which is today Chollas Lake. From that elevation, and by gravity, it was possible to supply pressurized water to what was then the City of San Diego, way down near the bay. (“Chollas” is a Mexican cactus, also known as “the jumping cactus”.)

Competing with John Spreckels to provide water for San Diego was Edward Fletcher, another land developer. He purchased a system that brought water from Lake Cuyamaca high in the mountains down to the city by the bay. There is some controversy about this, but it is generally assumed that Lake Cuyamaca is on the San Diego River. This would simplify things because the beneficial use of the water would be in the river’s own watershed. The controversy is that the Sweetwater River is very close to the San Diego River at the headwaters, and some people say that Lake Cuyamaca could be on the Sweetwater River. Be that as it may, Fletcher established his own reservoir, or more correctly purchased one then known as Murray Lake, in addition to buying the water system that came down from Lake Cuyamaca.

A dam had been constructed at Lake Cuyamaca to divert the water into Boulder Creek. A diversion dam downstream on the creek put the water into a 33-mile-long redwood flume that ended at the small pond that today is at Anthony’s Fish Grotto in La Mesa. From there, the water flowed across what is now the Parkway Plaza Shopping Center in El Cajon to Murray Lake. “Flume Road” in San Diego is one block north of Dallas as that street makes a straight run westward towards Lake Murray. Fletcher purchased the lake, and in 1918 built the concrete dam to increase its capacity and renamed it Lake Murray. He also purchased the flume system from the Cuyamaca Water Company and, after building the dam at Lake Murray, sent water down Mission Valley and up to a standpipe on India Street in San Diego. First his water was pumped up to Hillcrest and then on down to India Street. The path that the pipeline took up out of the valley is now a street that is known as Backman Place, which runs from Hotel Circle in Mission Valley to the Scripps Mercy Hospital parking lot up on top. The hotel swimming pools at a later time took out Fletcher’s pumps.



*Dedication of the San Diego Flume
February 22, 1889.*

As mentioned before, John Spreckels was on the city council, and he was instrumental in San Diego purchasing his water system before Fletcher’s arrived. Ed Fletcher sold his system at a financial loss to the San Diego and Cuyamaca Water Company, which later became Helix Water District. Lake Murray was transferred to the City of San Diego in 1961.

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The laws that pertain to rivers and streams require that one must own the water rights to the whole watershed before that person may export any water outside of that watershed. Spreckels purchased the whole Otay River watershed which included the Cottonwood and Pine Valley Creeks, so that he could pump water to Chollas Heights. John Spreckels was on the San Diego City Council, and he recouped his investment by selling the whole system to the City of San Diego. That is how San Diego came to own Morena (built in 1897), Lower Otay (built in 1893 by Elisha Spurr Babcock), and Chollas lakes (built in 1905).

The City of San Diego constructed other dams on that system including Barrett Lake in 1922 and the Upper Otay Reservoir in 1959. The City of San Diego went on to construct the dam that filled the El Capitan valley in 1932, which is on the San Diego River. The city purchased the valley from the two Native American tribes that were there, and these tribes went on to found the Barona and Viejas reservations and casinos.

Following several years of drought, the San Diego City Council, in January, 1916, granted a \$10,000 contract to fill the Morena reservoir to Charles Hatfield, who advertised himself as a rainmaker. This was a sizeable sum for those days. Previous to this, in 1906, the Klondike gold fields had offered Hatfield \$10,000 for rain, and that attempt was unsuccessful. However, other attempts to create rain had been successful but paid lesser amounts of money. Hatfield built a tower near the Morena reservoir from which he released secret vapors into the atmosphere. The rains came, and the ensuing floods became known as “the Hatfield floods.” Water topped Lake Morena’s spillway. The dam at the Lower Otay reservoir burst, flooding the Otay Valley. To the north, Mission Valley flowed bank-to-bank, and farms and livestock were lost. The railroad line to Lindo Lake in Lakeside was washed out, never to be replaced. Hatfield left town and was never paid, as the city insisted that he assume the millions of dollars in damage claims from the flood if he were to receive his check.

John Spreckels further invested in San Diego’s future by constructing “the impossible railroad” south and east from San Diego and through Mexico to eventually arrive at Plaster City, California. At that location the railroad met with the Southern Pacific Railroad for access to all points east. This broke the monopoly that the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe Railroad had on San Diego.

Ed Fletcher went on to purchase the whole San Luis Rey River so that he could take water up to his developments in Escondido. His financial backer was the Santa Fe Railroad, and during his purchase of the river Fletcher also bought Rancho San Dieguito. Fletcher renamed that area Rancho Santa Fe, in honor of his financial partner. Fletcher created the Bear Valley Reservoir, which later became Lake Wohlford. There were bears in that valley at that time, and it was a popular sport to bring the bears down to San Diego for bear-and-bull fights.

To the north at this time the same scenario was playing out with William Mulholland and his associates in their efforts to bring water to Los Angeles. Their scheme was to bring water from the Owens River to their city, a distance of over 200 miles. The movie “China Town” with Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, and Robert Huston is about some of the covert actions that went on to convince the citizens of Los Angeles to approve the bonds for the project after the city had secretly purchased the water rights to the Owens River.

Another land developer who was also active in Southern California about this time was George Chaffey. After investing in the Colorado Desert, an area east of Los Angeles past a range of low mountains, Chaffey constructed the Imperial Canal to bring water from the Colorado River to that area. He renamed it the “Imperial Valley.” A problem that persisted over the years with the canal was the amount of silt that washed in from the river. One year the silt was so bad that the canal plugged up and burst its banks. The water flowed unchecked for two years into an area nearby that had no outlet and was known then as the Salton Sink. This is how the Salton Sea, California’s largest lake was formed.



Salton Sea (Library of Congress image)

Years later, in developing south San Diego county, Chaffey named his new area Imperial Beach to attract investments from the rich landowners from the Imperial Valley.

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The Transmitter

In 1914 the Navy purchased land adjacent to Chollas Lake. The 75-acre plot became known as US Naval Radio Transmission Station Chollas Heights – USNRTS Chollas Heights. (USNRTS San Diego was on Point Loma.) Selected for its elevation above San Diego, the same reason as for Spreckels’ selection for his reservoir, the station began broadcasting in Morse Code in January, 1917. With great fanfare the first broadcast was from the mayor of San Diego to the fleet admiral in Arlington, Virginia. The station was one of four identical installations across the globe, each with three 600-foot-tall towers with an antenna suspended vertically between the towers. To the east was the Arlington, Virginia station at Fort Myer. To the west was the station at Pearl Harbor. And further west was the station at Sangley Point, Cavite City in the Philippines. When it came on line, USNRTS Chollas Heights, at 200k watts output, was the largest transmitter in the world. There was also a transmitting facility with a 1000-mile range in Panama.

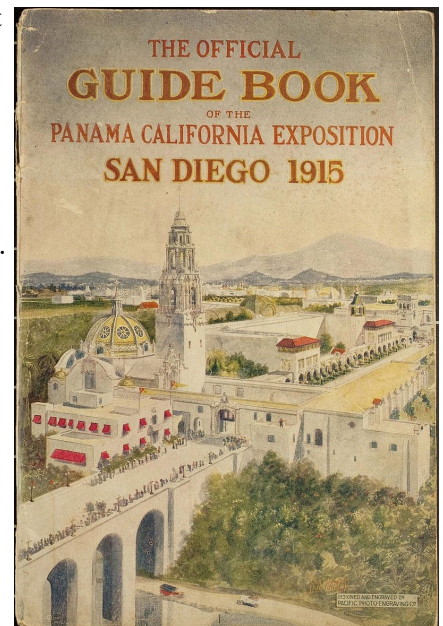
For a visual depiction of the transmitter site google: Naval Radio Transmitting Facility Chollas Heights NPL. The Chollas Lake reservoir mentioned above is in the pictures, seventh row down on the right side. The top of the tower that was removed by helicopter is shown on the bottom row, second from the left.

As was the method of steel erection in those days, the towers were all riveted construction. There are many photos available of steel workers of that era walking the steel beams of skyscrapers in New York many hundreds of feet above ground in their ordinary work clothes with no safety harnesses, tossing red-hot rivets and then peening the ends round with pneumatic hammers. These towers were just like the buildings in the big cities, and they topped out at 60 stories, the tallest structures ever in San Diego. The towers were a testament to the skill that it took to design and manufacture so many steel pieces that fit together so precisely that the rivet holes aligned during construction. Also, consideration should be given to the fact that the construction time for all three towers was not much more than a year, from 1915 to 1916. This would require a considerable workforce.

The Panama Canal opened in 1914, the same year the Navy purchased the Chollas Heights land. With the canal, the Navy expanded its presence in the Pacific Ocean. At the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1918 the United States acquired Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to use as a coaling station, further expanding the reach of its ships which in those days burned coal as an energy source. San Diego was the first American port for those ships as they travelled north from the Pacific end of the canal, and it also had a coaling station at Ballast Point. And to the west for those ships was Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, another US Naval Radio Transmission Site.

To celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, San Diego held the 1915 Panama-American Exposition in Balboa Park. This was in opposition to the president of the United States’ request that the exposition be held in San Francisco. This world’s fair brought thousands of visitors to San Diego at the same time as the construction of the radio towers and during the 1916 Hatfield floods. With the land purchase in 1914 and the first telegraphic transmission in 1917, the transportation of the steel tower pieces and the construction of the towers took place close to or during the torrential rains associated with Hatfield’s storms. The land purchase was in 1914. Construction began in 1915. The storms were in January of 1916. The first broadcast from USNRTS Chollas Heights was January, 1917.

Morse Code had been in use for communication for some time before it was “sent through the ether” as radio transmissions were called. It had been a means of telegraphic communication transmitted by wire which usually followed the railroads. After the “dots” and “dashes” were recognized as a way to send messages over the wires, Samuel Morse and his associates developed the system of letters. They went to a printers’ shop and counted the lead slugs in each letters’ box. In those days printers assembled their pages by adding letters one at a time to the plate that was then used to print the pages, be that newspapers or whatever. The most prevalent letters received the fewer dots and dashes as a means to speed up and simplify the communication process. Thus the letter “e” was “dot,” the letter “t” was “dash,” and the letter “a” was “dot dash,” and “n” was “dash dot.”



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Some transmissions were a recognizable series with a meaning, rather than a letter, such as “SOS”: dit, dit, dit, dah, dah, dah, dit, dit, dit, with no breaks and repeated, which meant “Emergency!” This standard transmission for emergencies was adopted in 1906, and the first “SOS” message sent from an ocean liner was the liner Titanic in 1912 after she hit an iceberg. Prior to that the standard transmission for emergencies was “CDQ” or “CDQ OM.” The first telegraphic emergency message between ships was in 1909. “CQ, CQ”, was the telegrapher signing on and looking for other telegraphers. The telegrapher held the key down twice as long for a dash as for a dot. And, just as in handwriting, longtime telegraphers could tell each other’s identity by their keying.

Marconi was the inventor of radio transmission telegraphy and held the patent. The telegraphers on the ships in the early 1900s were employees of the Marconi International Marine Communication Company. This company provided the communication service for a fee to the ocean liners, and it included the news of the day for the onboard newspapers in addition to private communications. Remember that crossing the Atlantic in those days usually took a week. The first trans-Atlantic telegraph service was by the German company Telefunken, with its service based in Sayville, Long Island.

Years later, on December 7, 1941, Chollas Heights transmitted the message: “Japanese forces have attacked Pearl Harbor. This is not a drill. Repeat, this is not a drill.” The radio station at Pearl Harbor was down at the time for routine maintenance, and the message was relayed to Chollas Heights for retransmission to the world in Morse Code.

As time passed the advantage in elevation that was beneficial to the original radio transmissions was now less important. The original 1917 radio transmissions were long wave, low band frequency. This was low frequency transmission (LF), and it followed the curvature of the earth and bounced off of the ionosphere. The transmission distance was the greatest at night. As radio transmissions improved, including going to voice transmissions, the frequency of the transmission increased, such as high frequency (HF) and ultra-high frequency (UHF) using shortwave broadcasting. As a rule of thumb, the higher the frequency of the transmission the more line-of-sight it becomes and the shorter the antenna. Today’s cell phones use a very high frequency transmission, and that is why there are so many cell phone repeater stations attached to the sides of buildings everywhere to eliminate “dark spots.” The more the radio technology improved, the less the height of the station was an advantage. Satellite transmission became all the rage, further reducing the need for an elevated transmission site. In addition, the cost to maintain the original towers for a frequency that was no longer used was substantial – over \$100,000 to paint one of them in their distinctive red and white pattern. USNRTS Chollas Heights was decommissioned in 1992, and the land was converted into much needed Navy housing.



Chollas Heights Naval Radio Transmitting Facility, Tower 32, 6410 Zero Road, San Diego, San Diego County, CA Chollas Heights Navy Radio Station (Library of Congress image)

In 1995 a contractor bid the removal of the towers on the premise that he could attach to one with a helicopter and then cut off pieces and bring them to ground. Remember that the towers were 60 stories tall. He cut off the top of one tower, and that was the end of his endeavor. That top is on display at the radio museum Chollas Heights. The subsequent contractor that replaced him used explosives to drop the towers into the designated areas for disassembly as scrap. That was an occasion for the neighborhood to gather together on Federal Blvd. south of Hwy 94 to observe the destruction.

For some additional neighborhood history, nearby at that time were two drive-in theaters: the Campus Drive-in at College Avenue and Ryan Road (now a shopping center, Ryan Road is now College Grove Drive), and the Rancho Drive-in at Euclid Avenue and Federal Blvd. (now home to Cox Communications). The drum majorette from the Campus Drive-in is on display at the College Grove Shopping Center.

The Landfills

The first landfill in the United States was put into service in 1937 in Fresno, California. A trench was dug with a bulldozer and refuse was placed in it. The bulldozer then ran over and compacted the refuse, and a cover of dirt was added at day’s end. Prior to that, refuse was separated into garbage and trash and handled separately. The trash was usually burned, and the wet garbage was sent to farms to feed pigs.

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What is now known as North Chollas was a burning dump. It was on the immediate west side of the same knoll and at about the same time the Navy was putting up radio towers and Spreckels was building a reservoir. The landfill at South Chollas, that is, south of College Grove Drive (formerly Ryan Road) began service in the early 1950s and was closing in 1979. In 1975, in anticipation of the closing, the city began excavation of the giant pit that now exists there. The surplus excavated dirt that was to be used as daily cover was used to create a berm across the northern top of the excavation as a barrier more than twelve feet high to protect the homes and the school that were there from the landfill.

The situation changed, and the landfill was cancelled. The North Chollas Citizens Committee challenged the landfill before the Environmental Protection Agency for violation of groundwater regulations. Refuse in a landfill must have at least 15 feet of separation between the groundwater and the trash. This would be a no-brainer challenge in that the proposed landfill was downhill from a reservoir that had existed for over 60 years. Also, it is hard to imagine that there was not an “invisible hand” from the Navy in the EPA’s decision to deny the permit. The Navy’s future housing would be downwind from the landfill in the afternoons when the breeze went west to east.

Also, as a former burning dump, the soil was contaminated with lead. The lead came from the solder that was used in the assembly of the tin cans of that time. The contaminated soil was later encapsulated beneath the earthen dam reinforcement. The dirt set aside for daily cover was used to make the dam thicker, especially at the base. And, prior to the contamination problem and the groundwater, there was the St. Francis Dam failure in 1928, and the Sylmar earthquake of 1971.

The St. Francis Dam was a gravity-fill dam in the Santa Clara Valley north of Los Angeles. This style of dam, as most dams are, was a massive concrete block poured in an arch, wide at the base and narrow at the top. It failed in 1928 and over 400 people lost their lives. What is apropos to San Diego is that Edward Fletcher’s concrete arch dam at Lake Murray was suggested in the press of that time as a less expensive type of construction. Viewing Fletcher’s dam today reveals that most of it has been backfilled against, and only a top portion of the original dam is visible.

In the Sylmar earthquake, in the north San Fernando Valley, bridge spans jumped off of their supports, and an earthen dam failed. Later, after having lost the ability to site a landfill at North Chollas, the city, rather than filling in the giant excavation, used the earth from the protection berm to reinforce the dam at the lake. The homes and the school on the north rim of the pit again experienced sunlight and fresh breezes. The earthen dam for the lake became much thicker, both at the top and especially at the base. The immense former landfill site, after a decade or two as a Water Utilities’ pipe yard, became a city park with two Little League baseball diamonds down in the bottom. The concrete loading docks from the Water Utilities pipe yard of that time are still there.

Chollas Heights Timeline

- 1897 Morena reservoir created by John Spreckels.
- 1897 Otay reservoir purchased by John Spreckels.
- 1905 Reservoir at Chollas Heights created by John Spreckels. He sends water to San Diego.
- 1905 Los Angeles secretly buys Owens River and sends water to Los Angeles.
- 1905 Approximately, burning dump active on west side of Chollas Heights.
- 1913 USNRTS Arlington, Virginia began operation.
- 1914 July, World War I begins in Europe; the US waits it out.
- 1914 After ten year’s work the Panama Canal opens.
- 1914 US Navy purchases 75 acres adjacent to reservoir at Chollas Heights for antenna site.
- 1915 The City of San Diego opens the Panama-California Exhibition.
- 1915 Construction begins at antenna facility at Chollas Heights.
- 1916 San Diego gives a contract to Hatfield to end the drought and fill Morena reservoir.
- 1916 San Diego County besieged by Hatfield floods; there is much damage.
- 1917 April, the US enters World War I with the sinking of the Lusitania.
- 1917 January, the first broadcast from USNRTS Chollas Heights, to Arlington, Virginia.
- 1918 Edward Fletcher creates Lake Murray, takes water to San Diego.
- 1928 William Mullholland’s St. Francis dam fails north of Los Angeles.
- 1941 December 7, USNRTS Chollas Heights transmits first news of attack at Pearl Harbor.
- 1975 The City of San Diego begins work on North Chollas landfill.
- 1979 The City of San Diego closes South Chollas landfill.
- 1992 USNRTS Chollas Heights decommissioned; to become Navy housing.
- 1995 The three sixty-story antenna towers at Chollas Heights taken down.

From: El Cajon Historical Society
P. O. Box 1973
El Cajon, CA 92022

To:

April Meeting/Tour

Thursday, April 20, the El Cajon Historical Society will hold its quarterly meeting and luncheon with a presentation from the new Cultural Center.

Please make your reservation early as seating is limited.

PLACE: Sycuan Band of Kumeyaay Nation
Cultural Resource Center and Museum
910 Willow Glen Drive
El Cajon 92021

(Former location of Singing Hills Tennis Club)

TIME 11:00 am

A wonderful catered lunch from Ritas Catering will be served at a cost of \$15 per Member, or \$18 for Non-Members.

Opportunity drawing, presentation, Cultural Center Tour and leisurely shopping at the new Gift Shop.

Please return your reservation as soon as possible.

A wonderful Pasta salad and vegan veg salad, cookies and beverage will be served buffet style.

April Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending _____ (\$15 Members/\$18 Non-Members)

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Reservations not kept become a donation.

RESERVATION DEADLINE – MONDAY, APRIL 10

Mail reservations and checks to:
ECHS, P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973