



# EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE



Volume 40 Issue 3

[www.elcajonhistory.org](http://www.elcajonhistory.org)

July 2019



## President's Message

This quarter has been a busy one. Most important on our list has been a health challenge that has kept Vice President, Colleen White, away from us. I am thrilled to report that she is doing much better and will hopefully be back with us soon.

We are also heavily involved in getting information to our grant writer. We determined at our last board meeting to ask her to write grants funding the following endeavors in order of importance:

HVAC – to replace the air-conditioning/heating system

Digitizing equipment and software (to include a computer totally dedicated to the project, software for keeping track of the information and accessing the information online, plus other things we can't even imagine we need at this point).

Operating funds to help keep us afloat for several years to come.

Fire suppression system to protect museum records/archives from being destroyed by fire.

Bus funds. We had very few schools able to tour the Knox this year because bus funds were not available. We hope these grant monies will solve this problem.

Also, we received our first check from Amazon Smile. If you are an Amazon shopper, please consider using Amazon Smile and designating ECHS as your chosen charity.

Fondly,  
Carla



# THE WW1 'INVASION THREAT' IN EL CAJON

by G. Carroll Rice

*Retired chiropractor Dr. Lawrence P. Bliss was an excellent resource for El Cajon history. He was born in Kansas, came here with his parents as a small child in 1910, and spent the rest of his life in El Cajon. Growing up, he attended El Cajon schools, studied at a chiropractic school in San Diego, and practiced in offices on Main Street and the corner of Main and Jamacha Road. In the early 1990s, we were both members of Toastmasters and frequently, after a meeting, we would have a cup of coffee and he would recall events he remembered from some 85 years in El Cajon. One of my favorite stories involved local citizens (he didn't tell me the names) during World War I.*

As The Great War (World War 1 - 1914-1918) raged in Europe, a rancher on the east side of the El Cajon Valley became convinced that the Mexican army planned to invade the United States. While his assumptions seem far-fetched, there were some threads of logic in them. The great Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) was in full bloom. Mexican Federal troops and revolutionaries frequently clashed in Tijuana, Tecate, Nogales and other smaller border communities. There were even



some US irregulars engaging Mexican troops near Tijuana in the hope of gaining land in Baja California. Considering the general unrest, the public confusion and emotional upheaval of civil war stresses, it is no wonder that many people worried that the hostilities would spill over into the United States. In 1911, the War Department ordered the transfer of troops to San Diego, established regular patrols along the border, and the temporary stationing of US troops at Camp Grossmont\* for training. These activities and 'training exercises' ('war games' and marching along the border) reminded everyone on both sides of the border that the US army had its eyes on them.

On the other hand, the revolutionary armies had many supporters in the US who supplied them with weapons (artillery), money, and favorable publicity (movies and newspapers). Some Representatives in Congress went so far as to urge a general attack on Mexico, or at least aiding their favored revolutionary army.



Through this period, Germany actively attempted to lure the Mexicans into an attack on US soil to divert troops from going to Europe. Mexico, however, was determined to remain neutral in spite of the US invasion of Veracruz in 1914 and the US army pursuit of Pancho Villa's army into Mexico after his 1916 raid on Columbus, New Mexico. That incursion ended at the demand of *Presidente Carranza* and the re-assignment of General Pershing, its commander, to take charge of US troops in Europe.

*(continued on page 3)*

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The rancher, realizing that it would take time for US troops near the coast to respond to an inland invasion, contacted the local militia. This 'home guard' organization, made up of men too young, too old, or otherwise unavailable for national service, was not only interested, but enthusiastic.



Basically, the rancher's plan was to pile up a huge heap of brush, dead trees and burnable wood on a high point near the corner of Pepper Drive and Main Street. At its center, he would place a large cache of explosives. When an invasion was threatened, he would set the woodpile afire; and the smoke, flames, and a loud explosion would alert the militiamen. They, in turn, would bring their weapons and ammunition to his ranch, prepared to repel invaders wherever they attacked. He was encouraged by their

enthusiasm and immediately put his plan in motion.

In a matter of days, the pile of wood stacked by the rancher and volunteers was considered adequate to create a blazing, smoking warning beacon visible from almost any place in El Cajon. As promised, the rancher planted his explosives (probably canisters of black powder) in the bottom of the pile. The sound of its explosion, he declared, would warn everyone across the Valley of the impending invasion. The 'infallible' beacon was ready and primed; the militia was fit and PREPARED.

On November 11, 1918 the Great War came to its end with the proclamation of an armistice, and the Mexicans had made no threat of an invasion of the US. The Mexican army still had its hands full trying to quell the revolutionary forces in the North under Pancho Villa and in the South under Emiliano Zapata. The country had stayed strictly neutral in regard to the Great War. German enterprises and agents were not hampered and the British navy bought Mexican fuel oil.

The woodpile with its explosive core sat idle, a reminder only of El Cajon's patriotism and spirit of readiness. The rancher decided that it was no longer needed and announced that on a certain date it would be set afire. He assured all that the loud bang would not signal an emergency. With some militiamen and other witnesses on hand, the pile was torched.

The wood was bone dry; the flames were very hot and did not appear bright in the sunlight. No billowing clouds of smoke rose from the pyre and a breeze blew away those white wisps that rose from the flames. The explosives . . . ah, the mighty explosives . . . disappeared in a flurry of sparks, a long asthmatic "sssst" . . . and an anemic "PUFF."

Silently rejoicing that there had been no invasion and their lives had not depended on the 'infallible' signal fire, everyone went home.



**\*Note: For additional information about Camp Grossmont, see Heritage newsletter, April 2014. THE ABBREVIATED MARCH OF CAMP GROSSMONT, by Mike Kaszuba. Pictures reprinted from article.**

# VIRTUAL HISTORY OF EL CAJON CONTEST WINNERS

by Carla Nowak, President

Our contest was streamlined considerably from previous years. Preliminary judging to choose a “Best of School” was done at the school level. We didn’t get many entrants, but those who entered are pleased with the outcome.

The grand overall winner was Mallory Kremer of Fuerte School. Her poster entitled “Mother Goose Parade” was very detailed. As “Best of the Best” winner, Mallory was presented with a \$50 check and her school is able to display the Hall Memorial Trophy for the next school year. A first place trophy for “Best of the Best” is hers to keep. The school was also awarded \$100 in prize money. Inland Supply Company donated the funds for prizes.

“Best of School” for St. Kieran Catholic School was Victoria Reyna. Her entry was entitled “The Convent”. Victoria has been awarded a “Best of School” trophy for her efforts.



Mallory’s “Best of the Best” winning entry.



Victoria and her winning entry.

Our hope is that more schools will participate next year.



# DIGITIZING OUR ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

by Carla Nowak, President

Linda Garity has begun the monumental task of making digital images of our 90+ boxes of archival materials. It will be an incredibly long and involved process. Each individual sheet of information must be photographed and loaded into the computer and then assigned keyword subjects so that the information can be accessed online. One of the grants we are seeking funds for is meant to aid in this process.

Thank you, Linda, for taking this on!



# FAMILIES MADE HISTORY IN EL CAJON

by G. Carroll Rice

Family histories are important. Last year, Colleen White was the highlight speaker at the January Quarterly Meeting, bringing us a history of her family, the Flinns of Flinn Springs. The talk not only revealed details of individual lives, their properties, and their contributions to the El Cajon area, but served as a reminder that every family history is a building block in the present.

The ancestors and families of many in our Society made their mark on the history of El Cajon and their stories should be told. They may have been among the movers and shakers of the Valley community or in a quiet unassuming way contributed to its growth, culture and economy. This is your invitation to contribute your family's stories to *Heritage* and help preserve the records of those men and women whose names and deeds should be remembered.

If you're not comfortable with writing for publication, submit your story anyway. Some of us are experienced writers and editors who can help 'polish' your submission for *Heritage* or for our archives if you wish.

## MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Keep your eyes open for details of our Membership Drive and 50/50 opportunity events. Details will come by mail!

## 2019 MEMBERSHIP DUES

We're so sorry to see you go...but if you haven't paid your dues for 2019 by now, your membership has been dropped as of June 30.

## JULY QUARTERLY MEETING

Be sure to join us for our Quarterly Meeting on Thursday, July 18 at 11:30am at Denny's Restaurant in the Fletcher Hills Town & Country Shopping Center. Our speaker will be Andrew Woodruff, who is the first vice-president of El Cajon's Heartland Coin Club. He will speak on US high denomination coins and currency. As time allows, he will appraise your specimens. So bring in those old coins and bank notes that you have held so long and wondered about. See the back page for more information and reservation form.

## 2019 EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice President	Colleen White
Recording Secretary	Becky Taylor
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Heritage Editor	Linda Foltz
Website Manager	Michelle Braun
Members at Large	Jack Dickens, Fran Hill G. Carroll Rice

Telephone Messages: 619-444-3800

# HELP NEEDED WITH THIS BLAST FROM THE PAST

by Eldonna Lay, Curator



A 2009 photo before this tiny “strip mall” and a popular Wienerschnitzel drive-through at the corner of Magnolia and Park streets were replaced by the City for a new central Public Safety Center, an underground parking structure, a planned hotel and public parking spaces. Building of the police building would begin in 2009 and be completed in 2011.

However, back in 1975, a group of young musicians (19-21) under a label named “Forest”, flew in from Elk Grove Village in Illinois, to “cut” a “demo” record for an upcoming audition in Los Angeles. Right away, they headed to La Mesa’s new teenagers’ dance mecca -- the “Cinnamon Cinder,” temporarily closed for reconstruction, There for a week, they ate, practiced and slept.

Tom Monahan, one of those musicians, phoned the Historical Society’s office during El Cajon’s annual celebrative day of music, games, Ferris wheel rides, and international foods and asked if our archives had a ‘70s photo of that corner “mall.” They don’t ... but our caller confessed to being nostalgic about his time in El Cajon and would love to have a visible remembrance of his youthful enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment in our city. So, if anyone has one to share, the Society would like to receive an e-mail copy for our files, then send it on to Monahan.

The ECHS email is echs0997@att.net.

Thank you.



***The tiny “Strait Ahead” recording studio was At the eastern end of the row of businesses on the corner of Park and Magnolia Street. Thanks to Rick & Sharon Hall for their research.***



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

**To:**

## July Quarterly Meeting

Date: Thursday, July 18

Time: 11:30am

Place: Denny's

2691 Navajo Road, El Cajon, CA 92020  
(Fletcher Hills Town & Country  
Shopping Center)

Menu choices include Breakfast or  
Lunch items from the Value Menu, or-  
Breakfast or Lunch items from the  
55+ Diner Meals Menu, if you qualify.

Our speaker, Andrew Woodruff, is first  
vice-president of El Cajon's  
Heartland Coin Club.

RSVP by July 11 by submitting your  
reservation form and \$15 payment to  
ECHS.

We Look forward to seeing you there!

## July Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending: \_\_\_\_\_ (\$15 each)

Name(s):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City, Zip:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone:  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### RESERVATION DEADLINE – JULY 11, 2019

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

*Reservations not kept become a donation.*