



# EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE



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April 2020

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear friends,

Since I last wrote, we have been unable to open the Knox House, due to the Covid 19 mandates. Once things return to normal, we plan to be able to be open for all four Saturdays each month, from 11am to 2pm. Thanks to Andrew Alegria who has joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday team of Eldonna Lay and Jack Dickens.

Bob Nowak has volunteered to help me keep the Knox open on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday.

The faithful 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday crew of Becky Taylor and Rick Hall has been joined by Yvonne Paris, and Tom Garity has joined his wife, Linda, on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday. Thanks to you all for your faithful service. Visitation has been good so far, prior to our temporary closure.

In May, the City of El Cajon is celebrating the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual America on Main Street (May 16, 2-9pm). In the past, we have rented booths and established a presence on Rea Street for the event. The past few years have not been good for us there, so we have decided to keep the Knox open during most, but maybe not all of the hours of the event. That means there is a need for more volunteers to help with the extended hours. If you are able to help or have ideas of activities that could be going on at the Knox on that day, please email me at [clnowak77@gmail.com](mailto:clnowak77@gmail.com).

Thanks,

Carla Nowak, President

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**Membership dues were due on January 1, 2020. If you haven't paid your dues yet, please do.**

The categories are: Individual \$15, Family \$25, Organization \$45., Business \$45 and Life \$500.

Please make checks payable to ECHS and send to:

P.O. Box 1973, El Cajon, CA 92022-1973.

Telephone Messages: 619-444-3800.

**Upgrade your membership!** Please consider upgrading your membership to become a Life Member (\$500). As Life Member, you pledge your lifetime support for the El Cajon Historical Society and its continued livelihood.

If you have already renewed your dues or became a Life Member, please accept our sincerest appreciation for your continued support!

# Jennie and George and Milton and Shooting Polaris

By Jack Dickens

George Cowles and his wife Jennie moved to the El Cajon Valley vicinity in 1877. They had been married in 1861 in New York where he had become a successful cotton broker. At that time, when they were in New York, he was 25 and she was 16 years old. At age 30, George was the first



*New York Cotton Exchange, Wikipedia Image.*

president of the New York Cotton Exchange, which he helped to organize. In 1869 he retired from the exchange at age 33 and began to produce cotton cloth in a new manufacturing business using his own patented process. He pursued this successful endeavor until 1875.

As a back story, the US Civil War began in 1861 and ended in 1865. This influenced cotton availability and prices. Jennie and George were married as the war started. The war ended a year before George became president of the cotton exchange. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, was a war powers act freeing slaves, but it applied to only those states that were in rebellion. Four states that had remained in the Union – Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri – still had slaves and therefore were valid sources for cotton. The Thirteenth Amendment banning all slavery was passed by Congress and ratified by the states in 1865.



*Marketing Cotton , Library of Congress Image.*

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While looking for a climate to improve George's health, the Cowles in 1877 purchased two ranches about a mile apart in the El Cajon valley totaling almost 4,000 acres. Their ranch house was located on the property named "Woodside." After planting 17 magnolia trees on the entrance to the other property, that ranch became known as "Magnolia." This is the source of the name of the street in the present city of El Cajon. In later years, Highway 67 took out the magnolia trees. George had about 100 thoroughbred horses and 30 head of cattle. He was very successful in his various agricultural endeavors, and he was at one time called the "Raisin King of the US." due to his vast grape vineyards. The community that developed around his Woodside ranch eventually became known as Cowlestown.



*Raisin Vineyard, Library of Congress Image.*

Mr. Cowles was also involved in banking, and he was vice president of the San Diego Trust & Savings Bank. He was cofounder of the San Diego Marine Ways & Dry-dock Company on North Island in Coronado. North Island was an island at that time. He was also a director of the California Southern Railroad which later was part of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. The San Diego Trolley today uses some of this same right of way, as does California Route 67 as it approaches Santee. The railroad left the San Diego harbor and ran east through what is now Mount Hope Cemetery and then turned north following what is now the I-15 corridor past Temecula to attach to the AT & Santa Fe Railway at Colton.



*Gold, Library of Congress Image.*

Milton Santee was a surveyor and civil engineer from Los Angeles. He was elected to the Los Angeles Common Council in 1884 and 1886. In 1886, while prospecting for gold in the Julian area, he opened the Ramona Hotel which later became the Kenilworth Inn. By 1888 he had established working gold mines in Julian.

George Cowles passed away in 1887. Jennie Cowles and Milton Santee were married in 1890. The new Mrs. Santee petitioned the county for a name change, and Cowlestown became Santee in 1893.

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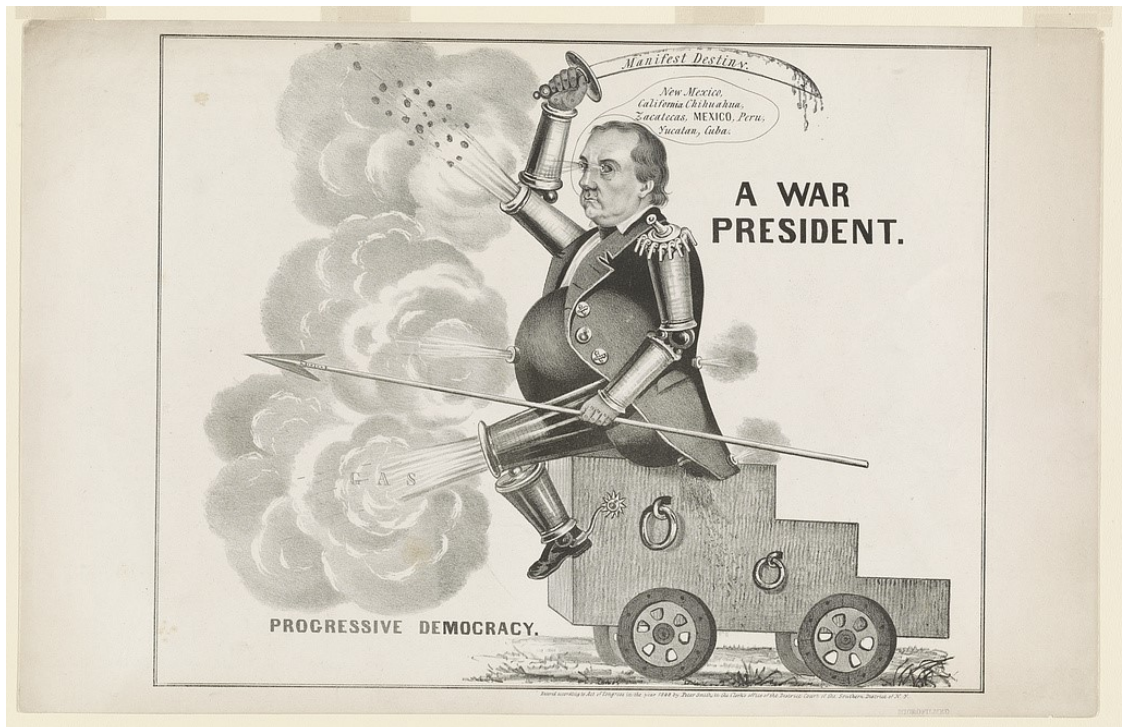
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Elsewhere in the valley, Isaac Lankershim in 1869 purchased Rancho El Cajon through his proxy Levi Chase and began to subdivide it. In the year after he purchased the 11 square league rancho (48,800 acres) Lankershim sold 10,000 acres to Benjamin Hill. He also gave his attorney, Levi Chase, 7,624 acres, most likely as a 15% fee for services rendered in the purchase and the land patent of the rancho. This was the Spanish/English interface where Spanish land values of square leagues became English units of acres. And Milton Santee, along with other surveyors, may have been there at that time to help facilitate the change.

In England, at the time of the Mission San Diego's establishment in the 1750s, an acre of land was defined as the amount of land that a man and a pair of oxen could plow in a day. Using Spanish units of that time, a square league, defined in varas, was equivalent to 4,428 acres. In Alta California the Spanish land grants were in square leagues. Mexican law in the 1840s stated that the maximum amount of land that Governor Pio Pico could grant was 11 square leagues, or about 48,800 acres. This was to counter Governor Pio Pico's propensity to acquire land. At one time he owned over 113 square leagues, or 500,000 acres. It was... "a grant for you and some land for me..." kind of thing.

Due to his animosity toward Mexico for not supporting his views on slavery, President James K. Polk, a slave owner elected in 1845, instigated the Mexican-American War. As a consequence of the successful conclusion of the war in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago, the United States gained an additional 525,000 square miles of land. At that time, northern Mexico followed the Rio Grande River up into what is now the state of Montana. This new area eventually became six new states and parts of four others.

President Polk was able to fulfill his one election pledge of "Manifest Destiny" wherein the United States would extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. California was part of this new land and was admitted to the Union in 1850.



*Manifest Destiny Print, Library of Congress Image.*

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During the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the war, President Polk pledged that the Mexican land grants would be honored. However, it wasn't long after the treaty was signed that President Polk was instrumental in Congress passing the California Land Claims Act which decreed that all California Mexican land grants must be patented. A land patent is the highest form of description of ownership. The deadline for the application for the patents was 1852. Any land grant that had not applied for a patent by then would revert to the public domain. Any positive declarations on the patent applications by the California courts were automatically sent to the federal courts, and each positive declaration in those courts was appealed by the government to the next level court, with the Supreme Court as the final challenge. The process to obtain a valid land patent could take twenty to thirty years or more to achieve successful completion. And all of these applications required an accurate land description in common units of that time, which was acres. Rancho El Cajon, a Mexican land grant of 11 square leagues, was patented at 48,800 acres by Lankershim's attorney Levi Chase, who sidestepped the courts and obtained the patent by appealing directly to Congress finalized by the signature of the president.

There was plenty of work for surveyors at that time. One of the challenges for the surveyor was to establish a true north/south line accurately. Magnetic north as derived by a compass was known, but it wasn't a true north. The magnetic north pole is east of true north and lies somewhere near Ellesmere Island west of Greenland in northwestern Canada. Depending upon the location of the compass, some correction was used for true north. In later years the magnetic north pole was located by taking a compass to that area, and when it pointed straight down they figured that they had found the site.

Polaris, the star known for many centuries for its position as true north, was used as a sighting aid. In the evening sky of the Northern Hemisphere Polaris is the star that all the other stars seem to rotate about. One way to find Polaris is sight off of the outside edge of the Big Dipper towards the tail of the Little Dipper. Polaris is the bright star at the end of the tail of the Little Dipper. It should be acknowledged that this was easier to do back in the day when there was no light pollution as is so common today.

To create a true north/south boundary the surveyor in the dark of night set the transit over the object marking a corner or a point on line. He would then take a sighting on Polaris, or would "shoot Polaris" and then project this down to earth some distance away and set a marker. This line is the new true north.



*Stars, Library of Congress Image.*

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Born in 1835 and eventually moving to Los Angeles, Milton Santee was a civil engineer who was busy surveying and developing new lands. He was part of a consortium that platted the community of Coronado. He ventured into the Santa Maria Pamo Valley and began to establish land plots for future sale. This valley was previously part of the Rancho Valle de Pamo (also called Rancho Santa Maria), a four square league (17,712 acres) grant to Jose Joaquin Ortega and Edward Stokes by Governor Manuel Micheltorena in 1843. Santee was so impressed with the valley that he purchased 6,000 acres in 1886. He started the Santa Maria Land and Water Company and began to subdivide the area.

In 1884 Helen Hunt Jackson's book "Ramona" about the mistreatment of Native Americans, was first published. This was a runaway best seller at that time, and it has never been out of print since its first publication. Milton Santee seized upon this fame and named his new development "Ramona," after the book, to assist in his land sales. His inn in Julian was also named "Ramona." Today, the Ramona Community Planning Area in north San Diego County has about 36,000 residents. This CPA includes San Diego Country Estates. The community to this day has retained its rural, agricultural flavor. The nearby Pamo Valley is now known for its wineries.

The 1850s were an era of prosperity for the Mexican ranches. Vast sums of money were made from the cattle herds by selling meat and leather to the influx of thousands of gold miners. Rancho Guajome, near now what is the city of Vista, is still in existence to this day and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings are listed on the National Historic Landmark, and they are also a California Historical Landmark. The rancho was a wedding gift to Ysidora Bandini from Abel Stearns, who was married to Ysidora's sister, when Ysidora married Lt. Cave Johnson Coutts. The adobe house was built in 1852 by Lt. Coutts, the sub-agent for the Luiseño people (Mission San Luis Rey Mission Indians) using Native American slave labor. Helen Hunt Jackson stayed at the rancho while gathering material for her book. Lt. Coutts also used the Native American slave labor to improve nearby Rancho Buena Vista and Rancho Vallecitos de San Marcos.

The City of Santee presently has a population of about 55,800. It was incorporated as a charter city in December, 1980. Its land area is 16.5 square miles.

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## THE COWLES, SANTEE TIMELINE

Year	George	Jennie	Comments
1861	Age 25	Age 16	Married in New York
1861	Age 25	Age 16	Civil War began
1863	Age 27	Age 18	Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation
1865	Age 29	Age 20	Civil War ended, 13 <sup>th</sup> Amendment ended all slavery
1866	Age 30	Age 21	George was president of NY Cotton Exchange
1869	Age 33	Age 24	George retired from NY Cotton Exchange; he began to manufacture his own cotton cloth
1869	Age 33	Age 24	Isaac Lankershim purchased Rancho El Cajon
1875	Age 39	Age 30	George sold his cloth manufacturing business
1877	Age 41	Age 32	The Cowles bought land near the El Cajon valley
1884	Age 48	Age 39	<i>Ramona</i> , Helen Hunt Jackson's book was published
1886	Age 50	Age 41	Milton Santee bought part of Rancho Santa Maria
1886	Age 50	Age 41	Santee named Rancho Santa Maria 'Romona'
1887	Age 51	Age 42	George Cowles passed away
1890		Age 45	Jennie Cowles married Milton Santee, then age 55
1893		Age 48	Cowlestown renamed as Santee
1901		Age 56	Milton Santee passed away at age 66
1931		Age 96	Jennie Cowles Santee passed away

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## Mourning the Death of Karna Webster

Karna Webster Oct. 15, 1927 – September 13, 2019

Karna was a leader in historical preservation societies in Spring Valley, La Mesa, El Cajon, as well as the Congress of History and the Westerners.

She wrote two local history books: *Chula Vista Heritage 1911-1986* and *The Hidden Heart of Spring Valley: A History of Spring Valley, California and the Bancroft Ranch* (unpublished) and co-authored a third: *La Mesa Through the Years*.

Karna was of particular help to us at the El Cajon Historical Society in doing the research on the Knox House in anticipation of being named Historic Resource #1.

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

**To:**

### April Quarterly Meeting

Please join us for our meeting at  
DiLeone's Restaurant  
1480 Jamacha Rd El Cajon, CA

Thursday, April 16 at 11:30am.

Cost \$15

Speaker to be announced.

Turn in your reservation form early!

Looking forward to seeing you there!

**NOTE-THE MEETING WILL NOT BE  
HELD IF COVID-19 MANDATES ARE  
STILL IN PLACE.**

### Welcome New Members

✦ Jack & Marian Doherty

### April Meeting Reservation Form

Number Attending \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15 Each

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

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

### RESERVATION DEADLINE

**April 10, 2020**

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

*Reservations not kept become a donation.*