



# EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE



Volume 44 Issue 2

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

April 2022

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



This month's message starts with Thank-Yous. Thank you to all of you who have renewed your membership in the El Cajon Historical Society and Thank You to all those who included an extra donation along with their membership renewal. Thank you and welcome to our new members who just joined us in our mission to preserve the History of El Cajon.

Next we are excited to let you know about some upcoming activities.

First, we have redefined and re-established the Third Grade Essay Contest. As you may recall, we operated the Essay Contest for over 48 years until circumstances caused a pause in our ability to continue with it. For me, being able to restart the contest is an important step in honoring our predecessors (The Millers) who put so much time and effort in revealing El Cajon's History to the Third grade students. Part of the redefining process was to present a new theme for the contest. We have selected as the theme, "My Family History". It is an opportunity for the students to learn about their family, when their family arrived in El Cajon, why they came, how they got here, and what they did when they got here. Questions that when we get older, we may have wished we knew the answers to but the resources to answer those questions may no longer be available. One of the advantages to this theme is the students do not have to go any further than their own home to do research for the essay and there are no wrong answers.

Second, we will be offering an Opportunity Drawing fundraiser: Featuring "A Day Trip to the Back Country" of San Diego County in April. The winner of this drawing will receive (2) tickets to ride The Golden State Train in Campo and a (1) year membership to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Association (PSRM). We have included an article about PSRM, the museum and its mission in this month's newsletter. In addition, the winner will receive a gift certificate for (2) free meals at Janet's Montana Cafe in Alpine, and to make the trip to the back country more affordable we are including a \$50 gas gift card.

As I started this message with "Thank-Yous", I would like to end this message with Thank-Yous. We are extremely grateful to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Association and Janet's Montana Cafe for their generous donations to make this opportunity drawing day trip possible. In advance, thank you to all of you (our members) for your support of the opportunity drawing and your continued support of the Historical Society.

Together, I am confident we will resolve the pandemic caused deficit that we have been facing.

Rick Hall, ECHS President

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SAN DIEGO & ARIZONA RAILWAY

By Bruce Semelsberger

The San Diego railroad saga began in May of 1854 when a small group of Old Town merchants formed a corporation to bring a new form of transportation from San Diego directly over the mountains and on to the east. It finally culminated with the opening of the San Diego and Arizona Railway in November of 1919, 65 years later. There were many disappointments along the way; The "Gila" road in 1854, the Memphis, El Paso & Pacific in 1869 and the Texas & Pacific in 1873. The Southern Pacific in 1879 bypassed San Diego for a land grab.

The California Southern in 1885 finally made a connection to the east via the Santa Fe system, but it was through an impractical northern route and ended up by 1891 as only a branch line to Los Angeles. Local merchant George Marston tried again in 1901-1905 with the San Diego Eastern Railway. A survey was made via the Otay Valley, but the funds for construction were not forthcoming. It was not until 1906 that everything finally came together with a partnership between John D. Spreckels and E.E. Harriman, president of the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific lines. The San Diego Eastern turned over all of its assets to the new San Diego & Arizona Railway. The SD&A promised to construct a direct line east to a connection with the SP at El Centro in the Imperial Valley. Another SP project, the Inter-Continental Railway, ran from Calexico through Mexico to a point on the SP near Yuma, Arizona, allowing a direct routing for SD&A passenger trains eastward.

SP management wanted an "all American" route, but the previous surveys and a new one by the SD&A itself proved that route to be extremely difficult and expensive, so the SP engineers were forced to accept a deal between John Spreckels and the Mexican government to form a separate company, the Ferrocarril Tijuana e Tecate (T&T), to operate through 44 miles of Mexico and bypass the coastal mountains. Construction began immediately as soon as the surveys were completed, but a series of disasters including a revolution in Mexico, the death of E.E. Harriman, World War I, the "rainmaker" flood of 1916 and the flu epidemic delayed the completion for 13 years.

While the SD&A was under construction, John Spreckels was also busy establishing a modern electric trolley system in San Diego and establishing a local feeder system for the new main line. This was done by buying up several of the small local railroads built during the "Great Land Boom" of the 1880s. The National City & Otay RR connected downtown San Diego with the south bay and the Mexican border as well as a branch through the Sweetwater Valley to La Presa. The Coronado Belt Line paralleled the NC&O from San Diego through the Chollas Valley to National City. At 24<sup>th</sup> Street it continued straight south and ran along the bay and up the Silver Strand to the Hotel Del Coronado, then around the bay side of Coronado to the ferry landing. Both railroads were purchased by Spreckels, forming the San Diego Southern.

The San Diego, Cuyamaca & Eastern was surveyed through Warner's ranch and down to the desert but only 25 miles were built by California Governor Waterman along the current San Diego Trolley right of way through Lemon Grove, La Mesa, and El Cajon. It continued through the present site of Gillespie Field to Santee and Lakeside and terminated at Foster's Station near the present San Vicente dam. It was merged with the San Diego Southern to form the San Diego & Southeastern Railway in 1913, which in turn was merged into the SD&A upon its completion.

It had been intended to keep the SD&SE separate, but the 1916 flood destroyed routes from Lakeside north and through the south bay.

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The SD&A was beset by problems in the 21 required tunnels even during construction. A major fire in tunnel 7 in the Carriso Gorge where the line transitions from the mountains down to the desert forced its abandonment and the building of a bypass around it. The new railroad was shut down for half of 1920 as a result. A 1931 landslide at tunnel 15 forced another new bypass and the construction of the Goat Canyon trestle: 664 feet long, 185 feet high and curved 15 degrees to close the gap at the head of the canyon. After the death of John Spreckels in 1926, the line was absorbed by the SP, the name changed to San Diego & Arizona Eastern and operated until 1976 when tropical storm Kathleen washed out large portions. The SP repaired the damages and then sold the line to the City of San Diego. The city only wanted the San Diego to Mexico portion for its light rail system, but the SP offer was all or nothing. The city has struggled ever since to find a reliable freight operator for the “desert line” but with no great success.



The volunteers at the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum help to recreate the experience of passenger trains running on the Impossible Railroad. Almost every weekend, train excursions depart the historic Campo Depot and take guests on a 45-minute scenic trip through the rugged backcountry of San Diego’s east county. Step back in time and take a trip on the San Diego & Arizona Railway! For times and ticketing information, visit [www.psrml.org](http://www.psrml.org).



Don't forget—ECHS is offering an Opportunity Drawing fundraiser: Featuring “A Day Trip to the Back Country” of San Diego County. The winner of this drawing will receive (2) tickets to ride The Golden State Train in Campo and a (1) year membership to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Association (PSRM), a gift certificate for (2) free meals at Janet's Montana Cafe in Alpine, and a \$50 gas gift card. A package valued at over \$150 for only a \$15 requested donation. We have emailed the details and drawing form out, and a drawing form is included here below as well. You may submit as many times as you like, and entries must be received by April 11. You need not be present to win. We thank you in advance for your interest and appreciate your support.

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**Day Trip Opportunity Drawing Donation Slip**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tickets @ \$15.00 ea. \_\_\_\_\_

All proceeds to benefit the: El Cajon Historical Society  
P. O. Box 1973  
El Cajon, CA 92022



# THAT HOUSE ON THE HILL

By Linda Foltz

I set out to write this article about my dad's contribution to El Cajon History with his architectural designs. I have personally lived an unremarkable life, and so did my dad. But I recently realized that, unlike me, my dad left his mark all over El Cajon. I had always known it from a personal perspective as his daughter. Just as when he was alive, I can still get in my car and head in any direction through El Cajon and before long I will pass by a restaurant, strip mall, apartment building or office building that he designed. And while those buildings didn't make up the bulk of his work, they are the ones I can pretty much guarantee that you have also seen many times. But my dad was primarily a custom home designer and so it is those homes, nestled in among the foothills of the East County that were most representative of his work. The neighborhoods of Singing Hills, or Hidden Mesa, Jamul, Dehesa up into Alpine, are home to his homes. He designed for a few people you may have heard of, but mostly he designed for people you wouldn't have heard of who just simply hired my dad to design their dream home.

His name was Jay Foltz, and his was a career that began while he was still a student at Grossmont High School and spanned fifty-ish years until his passing in 2008. And my intention here was to write about those more recognizable designs that would be familiar to you, including one that no longer exists but was quite a well-known landmark while it did. I have seen photos of it floating around on social media on occasion but have none myself. Knowing the house only as George Brown, Jr.'s house, I reached out to our ECHS team with no more information than that, hoping the archives may have a photo I could include. And our great researchers, Linda Garity and Carla Nowak found so much more than just a photo. They found an article that was originally published in the San Diego Union Tribune on November 4, 1977. It was just such a gem for me in that it not only had a photo of that house, but several, and a great article. It brought my dad back to life for me in a way I hadn't anticipated. And so I couldn't resist morphing this piece into one that highlights just this particular work of his by sharing some excerpts and photos from the article and a bit of my personal memories and insight.

I mentioned those custom homes nestled in the foothills, and many are. But my dad really preferred to perch a home rather than nestle it. His favorite type of lot to design or build on was at the top of a steep hill (the more terrifying the driveway the more fun for him), with lots of boulders and an amazing view he could create a home for. The more challenging the property, the happier it made him. I don't know how challenging this property was for my dad, but I do know it was the design he was most challenged by.



George C. Brown III was described in this article as the *"king of racquetball"* a *"darkly handsome 28-year-old prince of commerce"* with *"two Cadillacs and a black Rolls-Royce"* in the driveway. My mom recalls George Brown Jr. once giving her a ride in that Rolls-Royce, which was a real treat for the car lover she is. I don't really remember George Brown, Jr., much myself though I'm sure I met him. My dad probably began the design in 1974 or 1975 so I would have been 11 or 12 years old. I do remember tagging along as a kid to deliver sets of plans to him at his racquetball club in Mission Valley so it's likely I met him there, or at my dad's office.

The article goes on to state that he *"has built a castle high above everybody and everything in El Cajon Valley."* It shares that his housekeeper and friend who had known him since he was a tot, described him as *"a wonderful, kind and generous man"* and that she *"wouldn't take care of a house this size for anybody else."*

It further describes *"The massive golden-colored concrete mansion can be seen for miles. Look to your left and up from Greenfield drive in El Cajon and there it is, dominating a craggy, boulder-covered precipice. Brown has so far invested nearly \$800,000 in the house, which during construction was literally raised 20 feet. It gave him a fourth level in what was to be a tri-level house and added 4,000 square feet, bringing the total living area to 14,000 square feet. At one point, the house is 60 feet high."*

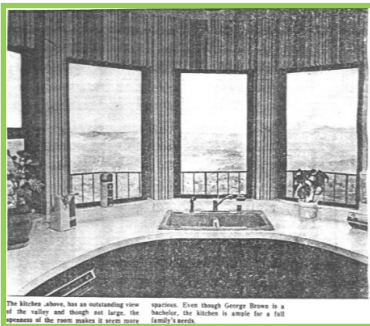
This was probably the biggest home my dad designed. Most were in the 2,500-4,500 square footage range, though some were much larger. *"The structure itself,"* it continues, *"is curves and difficult to explain architecturally."* This makes me laugh because I imagine my dad agreed with that statement as well. It continues that George Brown, Jr. describes it well, saying *"I've always admired the Health Services Building at San Diego State, with its round outlines. I went through three sets of architectural drawings before*

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*I got what I wanted.*” My dad isn’t mentioned as being the architect, which probably made him happy, as it was not a design that he wanted to be known for. My mom, who was married to my dad at the time he began this design, confirms for me that the SDSU architecture was, indeed, what George Brown, Jr. was going for. She also remembered my dad hated designing this house. Hate may be too strong of a word (though possibly not) but I also remember this was by far the least favorite design of his career. Probably the only one he didn’t like. I don’t know specifically why-my dad

didn’t talk about his designs much. Looking at the photo of the exterior of the house, I can say it really looks almost nothing like any of the other homes or buildings my dad designed over his career. It is unique in that sense. The property had all the elements my dad loved---a beautiful view lot atop a giant hill filled with boulders. The design accentuated those views, and that is something my dad would always do.

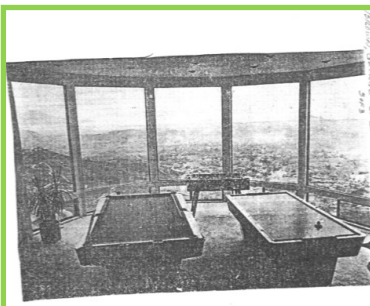


The photo on the right is of a small office in the house. The description says it *“is adjacent to the entry and like all the rooms in the house, has a window overlooking the valley.”* He would absolutely create a view in every room possible-even placing many homeowner’s bathtubs right in front of a giant window-even if the view from it was only a rocky hillside just feet away.



A photo of the kitchen shows this as well, as he always put big view windows in his kitchens. He figured you should be able to have a beautiful view while you’re standing at your kitchen sink. I love that George

Brown’s housekeeper mentions hers in the article, saying that she especially likes the panoramic view and watching as the fog drifts up from the valley floor. This may be the only oval shaped kitchen my dad ever designed. What is odd to me is the separation of those windows. I’m no architect or engineer myself, but I’m sure it would have been structurally necessary for the design. It just doesn’t seem like one of my dad’s preferences, as I knew him to go for unobstructed or seamless views. I suspect my dad initially designed something quite different here.

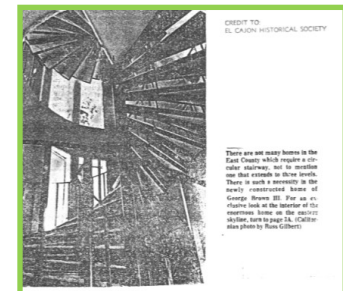


The caption of the living room photo says that it gives the feeling of being in the outdoors. The game room shows off that panoramic view with more giant windows. For several decades those rows of windows blinded many a driver traveling home from work on the I-8, including my dad, and it was just another thorn in his side about this house, especially whenever anyone in the car with him would mention it as we drove east in that late afternoon sun.



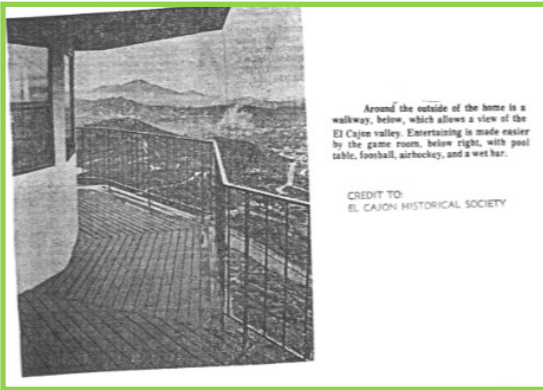
So maximizing the views was definitely my dad’s style and obviously prominent in this design. I just think he would have done it differently in those earlier sets of plans.

The article also shows a photo of a huge spiral staircase and mentions the home required it. Again, being no architect myself, I don’t know why it would have been a required element in this particular home. It also may have been the only spiral staircase my dad designed. I’m fairly certain most of his designs did not have one.



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The outside walkway shown here does look very familiar to me as part of my dad's designs. This was not the only one of his homes to have a similar feature.

So while there are many things in this design that are indicative of my dad's work with some of his "signature" elements, overall, it is, as I said, quite unique from his other work. I mentioned that this was the design he was most challenged by, but it's not because of the challenges he usually relished. I suspect it was probably for a few different reasons. My dad did not like to lose a battle. That included design battles. He was designing dream homes for his clients, but that didn't mean that a client would end up in the dream

home they thought they wanted him to design when they first brought their ideas to him. I do believe (certainly hope) they were pleased with the homes he designed for them, but if it came down to a disagreement over the actual design, my dad was going to fight for the design elements that he believed were the best for the overall design of their home or business. Which makes sense. You hire a professional because they know what they are doing. I can picture the battles in his office over those three sets of drawings for this house. Multiple sets of plans when designing a home are not at all unusual. And I'm actually surprised it only took three sets here, according to Mr. Brown. I can, however, picture my dad's late nights and probably many, many pieces of the fine vellum paper with its penciled lines that would have ended up in the trash before George Brown Jr. got the home he wanted. And, it was his home, so it should have been what he wanted. But perhaps my dad knew that designing a home to look like a college health services building wasn't going to make the best looking home. This home is definitely not the most aesthetically pleasing to me. It's big—but it's not beautiful. The more I look at it, the less and less it looks like a home my dad would have created. And ultimately, I think that is very likely what my dad also disliked about it. My dad loved designing dream homes for his clients, but he liked them to look good and make sense. So, to me, the reason this home design was my dad's least favorite, is because it was the least representative of his talent. When an artist paints a picture, they don't hang the worst one up in the gallery, yet this was a very visible piece of my dad's work on display for a very long time in El Cajon. Every time he drove on that freeway in the late afternoon sun, I imagine my dad was picturing the home he would have liked to put on that craggy precipice. I know enough about my dad to know it would have been beautiful.

I'm so grateful to the Evening Tribune and the writer, Kay Jarvis, for this article that gave me such a great look, inside and out, of a moment in my dad's career.

I don't know exactly how or when this house met its demise but it is no longer high on that hill with that panoramic view-or blinding the drivers on the I-8. I don't recall if it was gone before or after the death of my dad. I've heard that it burned down. I've heard that it was in ruins. However or whenever it happened, it doesn't sound like it was quick and painless and that would be something it had in common with the architect. My dad died the day before Father's day, losing a battle with colon cancer. Six days before his death I was helping him button his shirt because those fingers that held so many pencils drawing so many lines that became so many walls in so many people's beautiful homes no longer had the feeling in them to button his own shirt. It's a hard thing for a daughter to button her father's shirt because he no longer can. The last days before he died he was saying "when I'm better...". Like I said, he didn't like to lose a battle. He was such a fighter and such a lover of life that even though I knew he wouldn't get better, I believe he actually believed he would. He may not have loved this particular home design of his, but he loved what he did and that he helped to make dream homes a reality for so many. Maybe, ultimately, even this one.

## Welcome New Members!

- ✦ James Darrough
- ✦ Bud & Yoanna Neely



# ECHS HISTORY

Here is a little blast from the past—over a hundred years ago—that ECHS member Carla Nowak found in the archives.

It's a little bit worn (won't we all be at the age of 128) but we think you'll find it worth the effort for an interesting look back at the early El Cajon Valley.

## Past Due?

If you haven't renewed your membership yet, "YOUR DUES ARE IN ARREARS."

2022 dues were due January 1, 2022.

In order to continue to receive info about Historical events that have occurred in our area, notifications of the El Cajon Historical Society's community, business and social activities, you must pay your dues to be a member in good standing.

Mail to PO Box 1973  
El Cajon, CA 92022

Yearly dues:

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Organization \$45
- Business \$45
- Enhanced Life \$500

**EL CAJON VALLEY NEWS**  
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**W. H. SOMERS, Editor.**

**THIS LAND, AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF.**

Following are extracts from the very excellent article descriptive of this valley, by Rev. D. E. Ambrose, which appeared in the New Year's edition of the San Diego Union:

El Cajon valley is situated 14 miles northeast of San Diego. After a pleasant ride around rocky hills and through hollow canyons, we make a rapid descent into the picturesque El Cajon valley. Once here one sees himself apparently imprisoned by high hill walls, rectangular in shape, hence the name El Cajon, which means "the box." Yet one finds himself so admiring the prison walls that he has no desire to escape. But through these walls on all sides easy outlets are found through scenic canyons and around fertile and verdant hills. And other smaller valleys are quickly reached in many directions. The valley is about ten miles long and an average of four miles wide. Including the foothills, which are very fertile, making splendid citrus fruit lands, the area of tillable land properly included is much larger.

The San Diego flume receives its water from a large mountain reservoir some forty miles distant. This flume borders the entire eastern and southern sides of the valley. It has a capacity to supply all demands for water along its entire route.

The San Diego, Cuyamaca and Eastern railroad enters the valley by a steep and winding grade, at the southwest, and terminates at the northeast. There are two trains each way daily, carrying passengers and freight.

The principal product of the valley at present is the raisin grape, there being about 3,000 acres in full bearing, yielding about 150 carloads yearly, besides a large quantity of green grapes shipped both to local and foreign markets. The growers here produce a very excellent quality of raisins. They have earned a good reputation throughout the cities of the east.

A number of orange orchards are now in full or good bearing. The climate and the soil are well adapted to the growing of oranges and lemons. Many large orchards of both oranges and lemons have been planted in the last two years. And in three or four years many of the fertile foothills will be green and golden with full-bearing orange and lemon trees. They are even now a delightful sight. The orange and lemon will soon be the principal product of this region.

We grow the guava here very successfully—not extensively. They are a delicious fruit, equalling, if not excelling, the strawberry. They yield enormously when properly cared for.

The olive is a fruit exceedingly wholesome and pleasant to the palate. They are grown extensively here, some orchards being in full bearing, and many coming on. They are used largely for borders to tracts of land, and avenues, serving the double purpose of an ornament and profit. The olives are pickled for table use, and converted into olive oil.

The peach grows to perfection here, but is not cultivated extensively. So far as cultivated they are reasonably profitable. Many are dried and find ready market with eastern consumers. Many other fruits are grown, such as apples, pears, plums, prunes, apricots, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, nectarines and guavas. With irrigation all kinds of vegetables and melons can be grown every month in the year. Wheat, oats,

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**EL CAJON VALLEY NEWS**  
 EL CAJON, SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CAL., JANUARY 6, 1894. No. 1.

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

**To:**

## Quarterly Meeting April 20, 2022

Join us for lunch for our  
Quarterly Meeting!

April 20, 2022

Heritage of the Americas  
Museum

11am to 2pm

12110 Cuyamaca College  
Drive West  
El Cajon, CA. 92019

Price is \$15 (Value Menu)

Pizza, Pasta, Drinks  
and a Tour will be included.

Looking forward to  
seeing you there!

April 20, 2022 Quarterly Meeting Reservation Form

Number attending \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15 per person

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

**RESERVATION DEADLINE: April 15, 2022**

Mail reservations/checks to:

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

Reservations not kept become a donation.