



EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HERITAGE

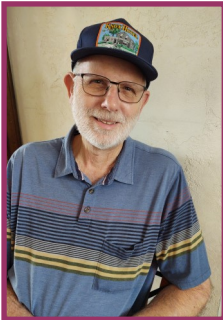


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July 2021

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As this issue of the Heritage reaches you, if all went well, we will have reopened the Knox House to visitors on Saturday, June 19th from 11:00am to 2:00pm with Linda and Tom Garity and Carla Nowak volunteering as Docents. We are grateful for their dedication and the time and effort they gave to make this happen.

As of now we are easing our way back into the reopening of the Knox House and plan to be open on the 3rd Saturday of each month from 11:00am to 2:00pm. With this reopening and with the museum essentially being vacant through the pandemic, the Knox House required a little TLC prior to welcoming visitors again, which has now been completed.

Thank you again to Linda Garity and Carla Nowak for their continuing work in the office. It is through their efforts the Historical Society remains operational, and thank you to the entire Board of Directors who remained committed to the Historical Society and it's mission throughout the pandemic.

At our June Board meeting the Board discussed what it might look like to once again resume our Annual and Quarterly Meetings and it was suggested that we poll the Historical Society members to see how you might feel about a Dessert/Ice Cream Social or suggest some other type of event that might be of interest to you for our Annual Meeting in October. If you want to share your opinion please feel free to contact at us at our email address : info@elcajonhistory.org or you can contact Christy at 619-442-8515.

I wish you a Happy, Safe, and Healthy 4th of July.

Rick Hall, President

Calling all family and friends!

Do you have family and friends? Now is the perfect time to encourage them to join the El Cajon Historical Society, especially because any new member dues paid after July 1 of any year include a paid membership for the whole next year! It's a great way—at a reasonable price—to share our great city's history with them!

Membership categories: 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.

Horses! Horses! Horses! In El Cajon

By G. Carroll Rice

NOTE

Horses have been economically important in the El Cajon Valley from Spanish Mission times through the 19th Century and into the earlier years of the 20th Century. This article is primarily concerned with the place of horse culture in our lives here in the last 100 years . . . particularly as enshrined in my personal memories. Some bits of information are based on stories told to me and some are derived from observations in my own family. I believe that they reflect the activities of El Cajon Valley people of the time and their horses.

Back in the 1930s and 1940s El Cajon was still rural enough to attract plenty of people who loved horses. There was abundant pasture land and wide-open spaces green with 'volunteer' oats and barley, reminders of the days when the valley was planted with fields of grain. Riders could safely amble or gallop along quiet country roads, sometimes stopping to purloin a bunch of Mr. Carbone's sweet Muscat grapes. On hot days they could move under pepper trees or use the driveways shaded by the rows of olive trees that divided the sprawling vineyards.

In the 1930s, and even later, one could often see horses pulling plows and other implements through orchards, vineyards and gardens. The iron sled used to gather and burn grapevine trimmings was still drawn by a handsome pair of gray horses well into the 1940s. Guy Winton had a horse and wagon that he drove down the streets of El Cajon in the late 1940s "just for fun." For real, old timer Burt Bushnell drove a horse and buggy from his home near Third and Lexington to the Knowles House for his supper almost every evening for years. He eventually gave up his buggy and began walking to town, as I recall, in the late 1930s. His rig had been hit by a car – the driver didn't see the dim lantern hung on the back.

When I was very young, about 1931 or 2, our evening newspaper arrived by horseback. Youthful entrepreneurs Blake Barton, Felix Landis or his sister Jean (yes, the future WASP pilot of World War 2) brought our *TRIBUNE* right to our door, much to my delight.

Businesses, artists and craftspeople catering to horse owners, riders and 'Western' culture enthusiasts have always been welcome in El Cajon. Olaf Wieghorst, whose paintings glorify horses and the old West, was an El Cajon resident for many years. Other local artists created admirable portraits of our horses, riders and rural scenes throughout our history. Consider the feed stores, the truckers who hauled hay from the Imperial Valley, the veterinarians and drug stores that stocked veterinary medicines. On the entertainment and personal service level, there have been stables renting horses by the hour and offering romantic moonlight 'hay rides' long after the livery stable at the Knox hotel was closed. Horse breeders, like Pansy Keene, offered stud service from majestic stallions, the *El Cajon Valley News* listed horses for sale and mobile farriers like Tony Lopez and Ish Benham brought forges, shoeing tools and skills where the horses lived.



The nearby Lakeside Rodeo began in 1920 and countless horse-centered shows have been sponsored by riding clubs and community groups. Almost every Saturday in the 1940s there were competitions and shows at the Rock'n'Ride show ring on Third Street – an easy walk from our house and usually entertaining. Most memorably, during World War 2, there was a spectacular show at the Circle S arena (where the Christian High School is now) to raise money to "buy a bomber for MacArthur." (As a patriotic Boy Scout, I sold ice-cold soda pop to the thirsty crowd.)

Horses and their proud riders have long been featured in El Cajon parades. Even the first of the famous Mother Goose parades was led by Juanita (Washington) Ahlee on a white horse "with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes." That's El Cajon!

Around home

About 1932 we acquired a Caterpillar-10 tractor and my father sold our work horse, Jill, to a Mr. Brunson living on a hillside off Washington Street. The old mare was delivered by my father riding Jill and my mother driving our Model T Ford ahead of him down the unpaved road. I stood beside her in my rompers, peering out the back window at my Daddy galloping behind. (Car seats for toddlers weren't available until 1933.) My mother didn't have a license to drive and my father, on horseback, stayed back to avoid the dust kicked up by our tires. Jill was safely delivered, and since Mr. Brunson wasn't home she was left in his corral with a wisp of hay before we left for home. Mr. Brunson remained not-at-home and Jill disappeared with him with no forwarding address. Over 20 years later Mr. Brunson came to our house and handed my father the money. He had suffered a laundry list of troubles and debts in 1932, and found it necessary to 'disappear.' He was back to pay his debts.

Of Nipper and the 'Cowboy'

At some time in his life every red-blooded El Cajon boy wants to be a cowboy. I know I did. I loved Western movies, juvenile cowboy radio dramas and asked my mother for Ralston hot breakfast cereal . . . "the cowboys think it's great" according to their radio jingle.

Imagine my delight when I found a cowboy outfit under the Christmas tree when I was six years old. There was a cowboy hat, a red-patterned bandana and chaps, topped off with a cartridge belt loaded with wooden bullets, a holster and shiny cap pistol.

For the next year I wore my cowboy costume at every occasion possible, including Ramona's Turkey Day. There, the San Diego County Road Department showed off its latest equipment in the annual parade. So, in 1937, a proud young buckaroo waved at the crowds from a new motor grader driven by his Daddy. For many years I treasured a photo of that day, but it was in a briefcase that disappeared out of my car a few years ago. My picture may be gone, but no one can steal the memories of that precious day. We even watched a parachute jump!

Chet Hardin, pharmacist and horse fancier, had an annual pre-Christmas drawing at his drugstore on Main Street. In 1937 the grand prize was a pony. My Daddy and I joined the excited ticket-clutching throng waiting breathlessly for the numbers to be pulled from a big glass jar.

As the drawing approached its end I remember a woman squealing happily as she won the second prize, a big baby doll. Then, to the crowd's shouting of "Chet, pull the last one," the druggist brought up the final number. Silence followed. Daddy held up his ticket and handed it to Mr. Hardin who took a look. "George Rice," he announced, "has won the pony!"

It's hard to imagine the changes in home life made by the addition of a hare-brained pony. Mr. Hardin didn't tell us our pony's name while in his care and keeping, but my mother called her Nipper. She bit or tried to bite anyone not on guard for a sneaky attack.

Many ponies have been abused and my father, a believer in firm but gentle horse handling, thought that with kind treatment Nipper would become less aggressive. He also believed it was time for me to learn to ride and the pony was the only steed we had at that time.

I watched as Nipper was bridled, blanketed and saddled, my cowboy courage fading as I realized that I was about to be aboard this beast. She had experienced this saddling routine before and as the cinch passed under her belly she took an audible deep breath. "They all do that," Daddy remarked, his fingers never pausing as he passed a strap through rings and pulled it tight. Momentarily satisfied, he picked me up and seated me in the saddle. The stirrup straps were adjusted for my legs and we were soon walking around the yard. Although I held the reins with my left hand and struggled to avoid the sin of grasping the saddle horn, Daddy controlled Nipper with a short lead rope. That was the beginning of my riding experience and my terror was eventually replaced by confidence. Much later I even rode Nipper a few miles to see friends Jerry Landis and Ralph Peterson, and once into El Cajon to have her shod at the blacksmith shop. (A blacksmith and welding facility was in the corrugated iron building now occupied by Sunshine Auto Repairs when it was two blocks to the east).

My riding skills may have improved some but Nipper remained as mean-spirited, 'ornery' and mischievous as ever. Riders were always in danger of being brushed from her saddle by low tree limbs, bucking and wild runaways. In one incident she swept my cousin John Ritter off her back under a pepper tree branch and ran down Lexington Street as far as Jamacha Road. Happily she was captured, gasping and blowing, before she could get out in traffic.

Our garage/utility building had two sections, each about 14 x 14 feet wide and long. One was used for common ranch-type maintenance and contained the workbench with a vise, anvil and typical tools. The other had space for bales of hay and sacks of grain at the back. Our venerable Ford Model TT truck was parked in front of the hay and grain, with about three feet of walkway on its left side between it and the wall, allowing room for access to the feed.

Somehow, Nipper got out of the corral one night and forced her way beside the truck to the green hay and sacked grain. It would be an understatement to say she overate. Bloated beyond exaggeration, she was on her side partially under the truck, with her feet and legs caught in the truck chassis, when my father found her in the morning.

Fortunately, some neighbors came to help. I think it was Mr. Trice, owner of a nearby horse ranch, who suggested that my father go to the Rexall drugstore and get the veterinary medicine to get gas out of Nipper (horses can't belch.). To make a painfully long story short, it took hours to untangle the pony's legs and pull her swollen body from under the truck.

We didn't keep Nipper much longer. I don't recall the details, but soon we had only memories, pony harness and a pony-sized buckboard (one that George and Juanita Washington had used to drive their pony to school before there was school bus service).

And then there was Dixie

My mother, under the influence of Mary O'Hara's 1941 novel My Friend Flicka and similar books, decided that she would like to ride like Ada Wilson and other friends. "Books like that," she told me, "make me want to be on horseback, drifting along with clean breezes under crystal blue skies."

My father, in a gesture of love, went to the nearby auction, and bought her a smart-looking 'green-broke' filly named Dixie. Dixie had good conformation and a shiny black coat with a striking white blaze on her forehead. My dad had a good eye for horses and I think he had plans to develop Dixie into a gentle smooth-gaited saddle horse for my mother.

Dixie had other ideas, accepting only a minimum of 'gentling.' My mother rode her a few times but found her too hard to control. She was high-strung, easily frightened and given to bucking without much provocation.

When I was a freshman at Grossmont High School I had chicken pox . . . and I had the CHICKEN POX in spades. I was recovering, still covered with scabs, when I conceived the idea that since I no longer itched I could exercise Dixie. It had been a while since she had been ridden and she really needed a good run.

Dixie was saddled and tied to a post by the garage when she realized that there was a barrel with oats in it nearby. I had the bridle in my hand when she pulled her head away from me and stuck her nose in the barrel.

Neither of us had noticed that one of our free-roving hens had also discovered the oats and was feasting inside. The hen burst from the barrel with a squawk. Dixie jerked backwards, broke the tie rope and took off running. I followed on foot carrying the bridle and bit, covered with pocks and dreading an encounter with any of our neighbors.

The chase led through two orange groves and across the wide open spaces of the Buckeye Ranch vineyard. Perhaps smelling other horses, Dixie headed for the Buckeye barn and trapped herself in an empty corral. I soon got a bit in her mouth and was in the saddle. As any horse person might guess, she was still all a-tremble and we had spooky sessions all the way home. In one ensuing fracas, I knocked about half the scabs off my pocky cheeks . . . the scars remained until I was in my twenties. We didn't keep Dixie much longer.

Geronimo

A long-deserted winery on Lexington Street had served as an army Quartermaster Corps repair facility during World War 2 and sprung to life again in the late 1940s as a general merchandise and livestock auction yard. It was an exciting place to spend an hour or two on Saturday, sometimes selling, sometimes bidding on livestock, cars, tools, furniture and miscellaneous junk. For many of us it was as much a time for visiting as for looking for bargains. Even if we couldn't go, the auctioneer's voice was projected around the entire area. "Now that ain't right on that cow, let's hear some more bids!" and his, "All in, all done and SOLD!" still ring in my head at the conclusion of a deal.

One Saturday, my father returned from the auction early, leading a middle-aged brown-and-white pinto gelding with blue eyes. "This," he announced, "is Geronimo."

What a memorable horse he was! Gentle as an evening breeze with a child on his back, he could step out smartly with a swift single-foot gait with an experienced rider in the saddle. Honestly, we didn't know what a gem we had. My father said he bought him because there was 'something' about Geronimo he couldn't resist.

Earl Bennett, a 'horse-savvy' friend, took one look at Geronimo and said, "George, I know this horse from somewhere, and I'll bet he knows some tricks." Earl picked up a stick from the ground and pointed it at the horse's knees. "Geronimo," he said, "kneel."



Without a second's hesitation, Geronimo knelt, bowing his head like an experienced trouper. As time went on we saw more indications of his extensive training and skills, and wished we could find the right visual signals to display his talents. In any case, we enjoyed playing with him, having him pull a cart or jump over low barricades. It was fun, too, because that horse genuinely loved human attention, especially currying and brushing.

Eventually it became apparent that Geronimo was getting old, my father had serious health issues, and with college coming soon, I would have less time for horses. A friend had a herd of older horses that were finishing out their lives on extensive pastures he owned in the east county and he offered to take Geronimo. The man loved horses and his offer seemed like an excellent solution.

About a year later, my parents were taking a drive through the back country when my father suddenly stopped. "Mabel," he said to my mother and pointed to some horses in a field, "I think that's Geronimo."

He got out of the car, walked to the fence, whistled and called, "Geronimo! Geronimo!" The old pinto slowly left the herd and stumbled to the fence, pitifully nickering in recognition. Geronimo was gaunt and listless; every rib showed in evidence that he was starving in a pasture of plenty.

Arrangements were made and Geronimo was soon back in El Cajon, still in obvious distress. A day or so later a woman drove up our driveway, came to the door and introduced herself to my mother. "I'm Dr. Jean Immenschuh, I'm a veterinarian. Do you know what's wrong with that thin horse?"

My mother said she was glad to meet her and admitted that she had no idea about what ailed Geronimo. Dr. Immenschuh explained that a horse's teeth grow as long as it lives. If the teeth aren't worn down by eating grass, they become sharp, irregular or too long for the animal to chew or even swallow. In a word, Geronimo needed to have his teeth 'floated' or ground down by a veterinarian so he could eat.

My mother's immediate response was, "Can you do it, Doctor? We love our old Geronimo."

"I thought that's what you'd say," the veterinarian smiled and went on, "I have some time this afternoon and there'll be no fee. Geronimo is an old patient of mine and I recognized him when I drove by."

Needless to say, it wasn't long before Geronimo was looking sleek and fit. He rejoined his 'retirement community' in the back country and lived out his days knee-deep in grass.

Rozita and Others

My father installed fences on our property in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, dividing our orange groves into four sections. The citrus fruit market was unreliable and the divisions created four pasture areas for new crops and livestock. Ultimately, the pastures were homes to pigs, geese, chickens, fattening calves and maturing steers, and, of course, horses. A few of our own horses pranced their way through our former orange groves and some owners, like Chet Hardin, boarded their race horses with us. The queen of the equines was my sister Rosemary's pinto filly, Rozita.

I was in college and then in the Air Force when Rosemary and Rozita began their happy partnership and were recognized as part of the riding community. I've been told that they entered several events at the local 'gymkhanas' and horse shows sponsored by the Rock'n'Ride club. As time went on, it became Rosemary's turn to go to San Diego State and she gradually withdrew from regular riding activities. Rozita was such a pet that our father continued to ride her for years thereafter. Somewhere there are photographs of Rosemary's son Alan and my oldest son Curtis being carried by their grandfather Rice on Rozita.

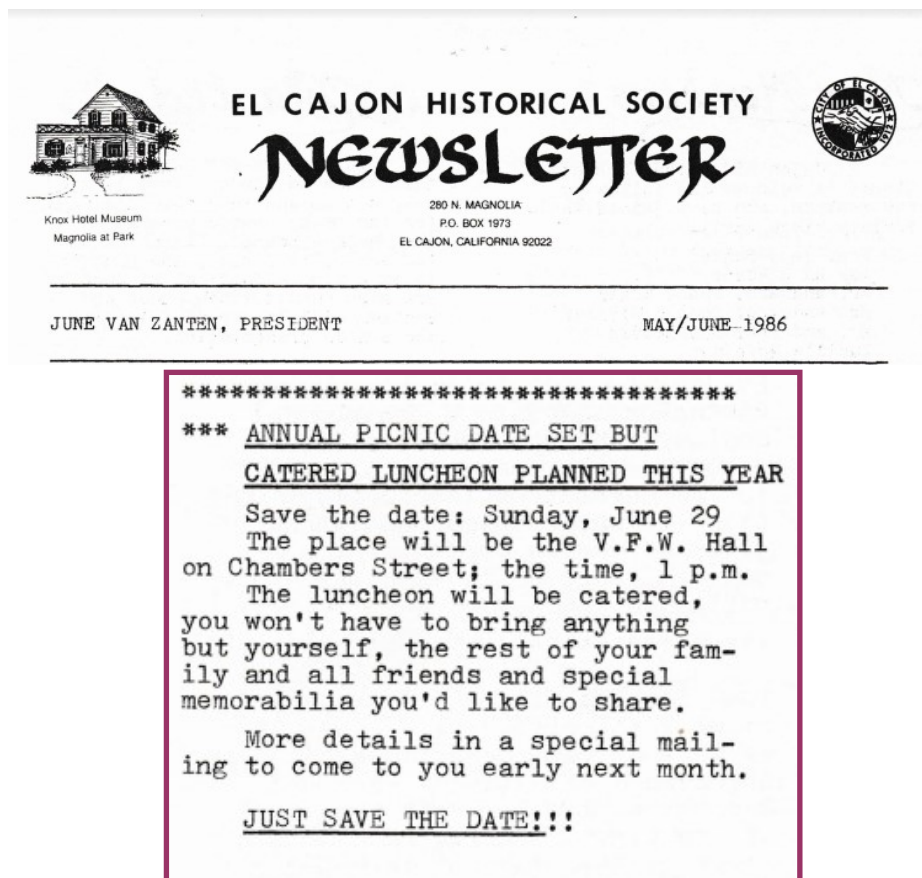
The population expanded rapidly in the valley in those post-World War 2 years. Freeways were built, housing developments and businesses multiplied like mushrooms. El Cajon was incorporated as a 'city' in 1912 but its real 'urban' development had started and our horse-friendly 'open-country' atmosphere began to slip away. We still had our horses, but there were fewer places to ride safely. As in similar communities, small farming operations, orchards and 'horse properties' dwindled in the wake of new and increased taxes. Zoning laws made agriculture, in itself, impractical in the El Cajon Valley. Our property, like the others, was, at last, sold to developers.

When our father offered to buy my sister Elizabeth a horse like Rosemary's, she exhibited her practical side immediately. "I'd rather have a bicycle," was her answer. And, that was what she got.



ECHS News

Our President, Rick Hall, recently dug up a few of our newsletters from the 1980s. We will be sharing some tidbits from them in upcoming newsletters, just for some fun reminiscing. Rick mentioned in his President's Message that we are looking for your opinions on a Dessert/Ice Cream Social or suggestions on some other type of event that might be of interest to you for our Annual Meeting in October. Below is from our May/June 1986 newsletter. A fun look back that may provide some inspiration to get those ideas rolling in!



Want to help make a difference while you shop in the Amazon app, at no extra cost to you? Simply follow the instructions below to select "El Cajon Historical Society Inc" as your charity and activate AmazonSmile in the app. They'll donate a portion of your eligible mobile app purchases to us.

How it works:

1. Open the Amazon app on your phone
2. Select the main menu (=) & tap on "AmazonSmile" within Programs & Features
3. Select "El Cajon Historical Society Inc" as your charity
4. Follow the on-screen instructions to activate AmazonSmile in the mobile app



“An Era Remembered: Roots in America:” Rediscovered

Review by Becky Taylor

For me, a prerequisite to belonging to the El Cajon Historical Society was my yearning to learn more about the place in which I was reared, especially in “the olden times.” I always enjoy researching in the society’s archives to learn more about the families who moved to El Cajon in the late 1800’s – early 1900’s and developed this “Valley of Opportunity” from an agricultural community into a city with a population of over 100,000. Last month on the Vimeo website, my brother Michael discovered three videos produced in 1989, all of which were created by our own Eldonna Lay. The videos are free to access, and at the end of this article, I have included the link.

The video series is entitled, “An Era Remembered: Roots in America.” Each video is approximately 28 minutes in length. Eldonna interviewed some of the citizens who grew up in the valley in the early 20th Century: Eugene Vacher, Etta Durbin Mercer, Leslie Stell Beatty, Phillip Thacher, Thomas Mukai, Jack Roether, Delores Ruis/Rios Howard, Karl Busch, Perry Walton, James Graves, Roger Hall, and Ed Fletcher, Jr talking to his granddaughter, Bonnie. The interviewees talk about why and how their parents or grandparents came to the Valley, share what growing up in the Valley was like for them, reveal the joys they felt living in simpler times, and provide some quirky information, such as why the Thacher family dropped the middle “t” in their last name. While listening to these engaging reminiscences, I gained more appreciation for the courage and ingenuity displayed by those early El Cajon pioneers and for our 21st Century creature comforts. I heartily recommend that you “return to yesteryear” and watch one or all three interviews. We are so fortunate to have these first-hand memories preserved for posterity!

Link to *An Era Remembered: Roots in America*: <https://vimeo.com/53898297>



EL CAJON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Knox Hotel Museum
Magnolia at Park

444-3800

280 N. MAGNOLIA
P.O. BOX 1973
EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA 92022



OCTOBER 1988

Editor’s Note:

Coincidentally, I came across this piece below from the October 1988 newsletter that turns out to be a very timely find about Eldonna’s video. Who knew Becky Taylor would rediscover and bring back this great piece of history to us once again!



Here is Fran seated on the left while at an ECHS tour of Taylor Guitars.

Eldonna Lay is writing and producing a show which will be aired on Cox Cable TV later this fall. It will be a six part, one-half hour program series of interviews of several descendants of early settlers in this area. Those interviewed were Leslie Mabel Stell Beatty, Gene Vasher, Tom Mukai, Delores Howard, Etta Mercer, Jack Roether, Ed Fletcher, Jr. and Phil Thacher. The County Library has sponsored Eldonna for a County Cable Grant to make this possible.

The note in our own ECHS newsletter nearly 33 years ago about the very program Becky just came across herself. How fun is that!

Founding Charter Member Fran Hill

As mentioned in the April Heritage, Fran Hill recently passed away. It is with great regret that we say goodbye to this longtime member. Fran was a Founding Charter Member of the El Cajon Historical Society and president of the Historical Society in 1992 and again in 2012-13. She was our archivist and a board member for many years. We are so grateful for her many years of dedication to the Historical Society and the Preservation of the History of El Cajon. She will be sorely missed.

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

To:

No Quarterly Meeting In July.

How do you feel about a Dessert/
Ice Cream Social or some other
type of event that might be of
interest to you for our Annual
Meeting in October?

If you want to share your opinion
please feel free to contact us at
our email address:

info@elcajonhistory.org

or you can contact Christy at
619-442-8515.

