

SCOTT, CHLOE/IS

A look back/ How El Cajon was incorporated

Ever wonder what El Cajon was like in its infancy? How streets or areas came to be named? What types of people were important to the early growth of the community?

Anybody who has lived in the area for even a short time has probably been curious about these subjects.

The purpose of this column is to help answer those questions and instruct us a little bit about our history. It is being presented by the El Cajon Historical Society and The Daily Californian. The photos and artwork shown with each column are from the society's collection on display at the Knox Hotel on Magnolia and Park avenues in El Cajon.

This column appears monthly.

By Chloris Scott

of The El Cajon Historical Society

THE CITY OF El Cajon is getting ready to celebrate its 70th birthday next month, but today's citizens know little of the struggle back in 1912 to incorporate the El Cajon township into a California city of the sixth class and the several attempts made in later years to disincorporate, scuttling the whole idea of a city in this "Valley of Opportunity."

It took two petitions of intent to incorporate sent to the San Diego County board of supervisors for its approval before a vote could be taken and approval or disapproval of incorporation could be expressed by the residents of El Cajon.

The first petition, which the board was to consider on Aug. 6, 1912, carried the names of 79 men and women living in the area to be incorporated. The petition, dated July 2, noted that there were 580 inhabitants of that area and gave a detailed description of the boundaries of the proposed new city.

It was those boundaries that caused the problem, for two men, P.M. Price and Alexander Legge, retained a lawyer, who also happened to be Mayor Wadham of San Diego, to question the legality of the boundaries being considered. Both were owners of property along Chase Avenue and they didn't want their property included in the incorporation petition. There were some property owners along the northern part of the proposed new city who felt the same way. The supervisors postponed their decision on approving the incorporation petition and referred the boundary question to the county surveyor.

The work of the incorporation committee had to be repeated following the report of the surveyor to the supervisors. Albert Brouwer, chairman, and George Gray, secretary, issued a notice for all those favoring incorporation, "particularly the men and women who signed the petition in favor," to meet at 8 p.m. on Sept. 10 in the City Club rooms (in the Corona Hotel).

Brouwer, Gray, O.B. Avis, F.L. True, C.H. Grube, W.D. Hall and C.C. Brashear were the committee appointed to recirculate the petition for incorporation, with the revised boundaries. When completed, the petition went to the board of supervisors with 80

It still wasn't clear sailing for those who wanted El Cajon incorporated. A public mass meeting of electors was held Oct. 22 to nominate candidates for the city officers: five trustees, a clerk and a treasurer, whose names would go on the incorporation ballot.

Twelve were nominated for the five-member board with the 67 voters present at the meeting, 25 of whom were women. Finally selected as nominees for trustees of the to-be-incorporated city were: J.A. Harris, F.S. True, C.C. McCutcheon, J.B. Rumsey and Albert Brouwer; for city clerk, L.T. Meachum; for city treasurer, O.B. Avis.

This slate had opposition when election day came. An effort was made to get together another opposing slate to those who had been nominated but time went by and the opposition failed to get those names filed in time to get them printed on the ballot.

A write-in campaign resulted in some confusion at the polls on election day, that Tuesday, Nov. 12, 1912, but the incorporation effort was successful. In the final tally 103 voters were for incorporation, 35 against, with 20 other ballots rejected for some reason or another.

SOME OF THOSE who had agreed to become write-in candidates won over those whose names appeared on the printed ballot. Harris and Rumsey were the only two of the five on the ballot elected as trustees (council members). The write-in candidates winning seats on that first board included William Stell, Dr. Charles Knox and G.W. French. Meachum was elected city clerk over his write-in candidate, and Avis was elected treasurer over his two opponents.

The city was incorporated.

Even though the ballots hadn't yet been certified by the board of supervisors, the newly elected town

council members met on Nov. 18, elected Harris as president and then adjourned to hold its first official meeting on the afternoon of Wednesday, Nov. 27, in the City Club rooms.

At this meeting the new officials took their oath of office, affirmed the election of Harris as president of the board, adopted two resolutions and had two ordinances approved for publications.

In the resolutions La Mesa attorney Lester D. Welch, who has helped with all the pre-election and incorporation legal work, was appointed city attorney for the sum of \$15 a month and the city clerk was instructed to procure one large map and five small maps showing the correct city boundary lines and the streets and alleys.

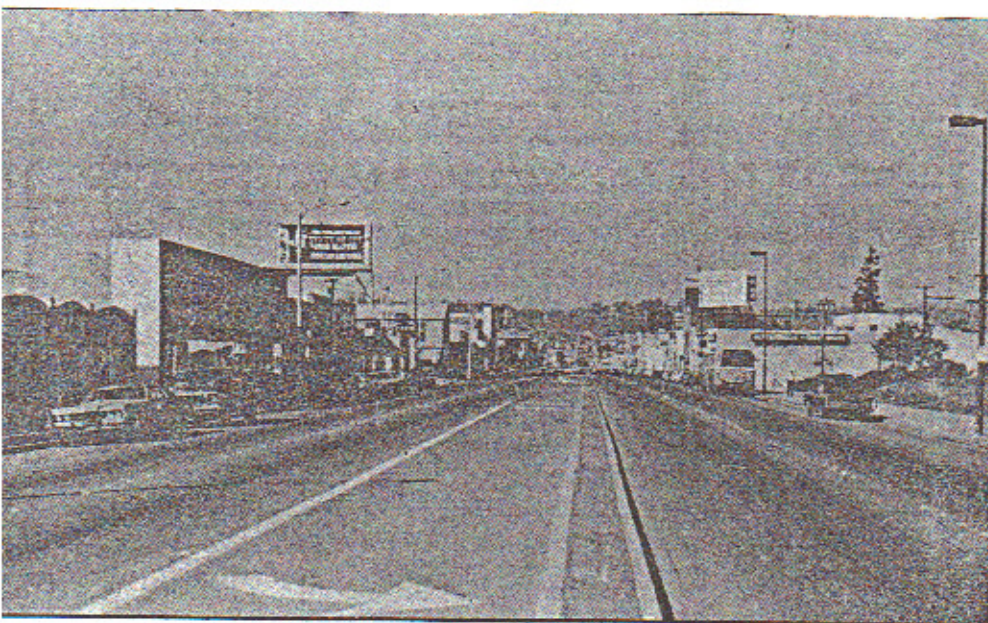
Ordinance No. 1, said that all meetings of the board should be held on the first Wednesday night of each month at 8 o'clock in the City Club rooms at the Corona Hotel. The second ordinance set compensation for city officials, the city clerk to get \$25 a month, the treasurer, 1 percent of all moneys received and paid over; the marshal, tax and license collector, such fees as paid by the county for like jobs, and the recorder, the sum set by state laws.



Photos courtesy of El Cajon Historical Society

Then

This is Main Street in El Cajon about 1910, two years before incorporation, looking west from just east of Prescott and Julian streets. On the right is W.D. Hall Co. The second building down the street on the left was the phone company and a bank. It is still standing.



Ken Shipley/For The Californian

Now

Main Street in El Cajon in 1982 looking west. The lawn of the Performing Arts Center is on the right. That's where W.D. Hall Co. buildings once were situated. On the left, just about where the billboard is situated is the building that housed the phone company and bank in 1910.

Forney, on behalf of those wanting disincorporation cited reasons why he and others thought the city should go back to its former state: "improvements commensurate with the tax rate," the state highway wouldn't go through downtown El Cajon since incorporated cities weren't entitled to county funds. Main Street was in good shape when the county turned it over to the new city but now it was a "disgrace as Mollison boulevard impossible."

DISINCORPORATION WAS DEFEATED again April 11, 1916, by a vote of 156 for disincorporation, 88 against, even though, at the regular election for city officials, held the day previous, most of those elected as trustees were for disincorporation. The new city trustees, who would have had an office if the second election had passed included Albert Case, Forney, Joe Karrer and R.B. Harrington who joined C.E. Brown, a two-year holdover.

The last attempt at disincorporation occurred in 1930 when 175 voters signed the petition asking for such an election. Of the 431 registered voters in the city, only 39 failed to vote. There were 182 who vote for disbanding the city, 204 voted against it with six ballots rejected.

During the second try for disincorporation the reasons cited included: too many city officials since the promise has been made to run the town economically and an engineer, attorney and others weren't needed; little city printing should be done; farmers were promised taxes wouldn't be raised as they had been, from three to 13 times over those in state and county; that the city grading of streets would make canals out of some, changing natural water courses, and benefitting only a few property owners.

Those objectors would be amazed now at the size the city of El Cajon. With an estimated 1982 population of 75,863, the city now encompasses 14.11 square miles, has 400 plus city employees and an assessed valuation of \$374,642,000. Seventy years have made a difference in the looks of El Cajon, from a farming community with a small business section to a sprawling metropolitan city.