

2009 First Place & Perpetual Award

The Julia Liffreing House

Bianca Paturzo, Vista Grande School

In the late 1800s and early 1900s people moved to San Diego County and El Cajon Valley to become citrus growers. They were called pioneer farmers because they were moving into an unsettled area to start farming. Many families were wealthy before they moved to the San Diego area. Julia Liffreing and her children were one of those families.

Julia was born in New York in 1823. While living in New York Julia gave birth to two daughters, Julia and Maria Ulrich. After the birth of her second child, Julia moved to St. Louis, Missouri.

Around the time she moved to Missouri Julia married Victor Liffreing. Victor was born in Germany about 1811 and in 1841 he came to the United States from France. In Missouri, Victor and Julia decided to go into the farming business. In 1853 Victor and Julia's first child, Josephine, was born.

In 1892 Julia decided to make a trip to San Diego. She was a widow by then. In December 1892 she bought sixty acres of land from Uri Hill, who was one of the biggest farmers in the El Cajon Valley. In February 1893 Julia bought one hundred twenty more acres from Mr. Hill. She bought the land with the plan for her family to become citrus growers.

In 1893 Julia had a Queen Anne style house built on the high hill on her farm. The house was designed by San Diego architect John B. Stannard and cost \$3,500.00 to build the house. Julia then moved her family from Texas.

Right after moving into the house, the family planted twenty-four acres of lemon trees. By 1899 the business was going so well the family started the Liffreing Lemon and Packing Company and were shipping lemons to the East Coast.

Julia's family was very involved in the community. Her sons Oscar and Nat were especially involved with Hillsdale School which opened in 1884. Nat and Oscar were on the board. They donated their time and money to build the school.

In 1900 Nat led a group of farmers in a fight to lower the cost of water to El Cajon farmers. The water company was trying to charge more money for the water. The farmers took the company to court and won.

In 1919 Julia died at her farmhouse. She was 96 years old. Julia left the property to her children. Nat then ran the farm and eventually had more orange than lemon trees. Nat died in 1929. The farm stayed in the family and was run by Josephine and Oscar until 1936.

In the 1950s the farm was bought by the Tom K. Choy family. The Choy family, who were Chinese, had come to San Diego about the same time the Liffreings had come to El Cajon. The Choy family had run the farm until the early 1970s.

Around 1984 Betty T. Chu inherited the property. Her last name was Choy before she married her husband, Robert Chu. Betty lived in Los Angeles and never moved in the farmhouse. By 1988 the house had been empty for over 15 years and it was in very bad shape. Betty wanted to tear the farmhouse down so that she could develop the property or sell it. Some people thought the house should be saved.

In 1988 Walter Enterprises, an archaeological group, excavated the area next to the farmhouse. They found 111 artifacts from the time the Liffreing family lived there. They found kitchen and household items made of glass and ceramics. The artifacts showed that the Liffreings were a wealthy family.

In June 1989 several historical groups filed a request to make the farmhouse a historical site. On April 3, 1991, the request was approved.

By 2001 the developer Shea Homes bought the farm so they could build homes and they began restoring the farmhouse. In June 2003 the artifacts found on the property were given to the San Diego Archaeological Center in Escondido, CA. The restoration of the farmhouse was finished in July 2003.

San Diego Ghost Hunters founder Maritza Skandunaz confirmed that her team of paranormal investigators did an investigation of the farmhouse in July 2007. The results were positive and her team plan another investigation in the near future.

The farmhouse is one of the last large and most beautiful old farmhouses still standing in El Cajon. It is now used for meetings and parties by the homeowners of Hillsdale Ranch.

2009 Second Place

The Fire Stations of El Cajon

Cameron Sisk, Vista Grande School

The History of the El Cajon Fire Department goes back to the early 1890's. In those days, they didn't have fire stations or real firemen. If there was a fire at your house, your neighbors and friends would be the only firemen around. Since then a lot has changed in the way that they fight fires in El Cajon.

The El Cajon Valley Fire Department was officially formed on March 1, 1923. The Department's first logbook recorded only four calls that year. In 2009 the firefighters in El Cajon will respond to over 8,000 calls.

On January 1, 1938, the City of El Cajon rented the Hall and Kessler Lumber office to be used as the city's first fire station. The city still has this building and they store it at Fire Station 9. One day they hope to fix up the old fire station and turn it into a Fire Department museum.

El Cajon began building a new fire station on September 3, 1943. It was located on Orange Avenue, just south of Main Street. The station cost \$3,800. The city paid for half and the volunteer firemen raised the rest of the money. The station housed the two fire trucks and other fire fighting equipment. It had a meeting room, living quarters for two men and a kitchen.

In 1952 a new modern building was built at the corner of East Douglas Street and Highland Avenue. The fire department shared this building with the police department. It cost \$75,000 to build. The fire department portion had a large apparatus bay, a kitchen, day room, large dorm, and some offices at 1301 North Marshall Ave. This station was called Station 4 but is now called Station 9. It was built with a large training area. They called it the Heartland Fire Training Facility. Before this facility opened, the firefighters trained on empty streets and vacant lots. Now they could train with a five story high-rise building, a two-story burn building with a basement, a water backstop for hose streams and a large classroom.

In November 1986, El Cajon replaced its 34 year old "main" fire station with a new station, Station 6. This station is at the corner of Magnolia Avenue and Lexington Avenue. It cost \$2.2 million to build and is 21,000 square feet. It has four bays and holds a fire truck, and engine, rescue unit, ambulance and a command vehicle for the chief. Underground in the basement is a fire dispatching center for all of Heartland.

My favorite fire station is the new one that opened in March of 2008. It replaced the old station at Third Street and Peach Avenue. It's located at 1470 East Madison Avenue. It has a huge kitchen with three refrigerators, one for each shift. It has a day room with a flat screen TV and recliners. There is a special room just for the firemen's yellow turn-out gear. It also has a gym with a TV and stereo. Every fireman also gets their own bedroom. All of the old stations just have a big dorm room with beds.

A lot has changed since the 1890's. In the 1940's the volunteer firemen received \$2.00 for every fire they went to. By 1950, the El Cajon Fire Department was a fully paid department.

The newer fire stations are more modern and much nicer than the old ones. Who knows how nice they will be in the future?

Third Place

The Flume

Amaya Latuszek, W.D. Hall School

Hello, my name is Theodore Van Dyke. I moved to the San Diego area for my health. I was an engineer, writer and an artist. I was pretty creative, huh? Well I came up with an idea that brought water down from the mountains to the valley of East San Diego. The reason I did this is because we did not have enough water, even to take a bath on Saturday. My idea was to build a flume to carry water from the mountains, 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles, down to El Cajon, La Mesa and Spring Valley areas. In order to build this structure I needed 7,000,000 board feet of redwood, 100's of men, 800 horses and mules and 100 wagons. This looks like a lot of money doesn't it? Well I was a wealthy man but not that wealthy. So I got together with some other wealthy people and we created the San Diego Flume Company in 1886.

The first thing we had to do to build this project was to build a dam at Cuyamaca. This project started in 1887. Next we started to build the flume in 1888. It took about a year to build this flume. It had 315 trestles, and 8 tunnels. The flume was 6 feet wide and 14 inches deep. The longest trestle we built was the Los Coches Trestle. It was 1,774 feet long and 56 feet high. The longest tunnel we build was the Lankersheim Tunnel, 1,900 feet long. This flume was so amazing that it was said to be among the greatest flumes in the history of man in 11th edition of the Encyclopedia of Britannica.

Boy, you should have been there at the party we had to celebrate finishing the flume! It was Saturday, February 22, 1889. The Mayor of San Diego and the Governor of California were there and we rode in a flat bottomed boat down the flume. When we went down the hill part of the flume it was like a roller coaster ride. We had the time of our lives. It felt really good to have accomplished this great task of bringing fresh mountain water down to the people of San Diego!