

Fairview Register

Monthly publication of the Costa Mesa Historical Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY



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Living Memorial Award Nominations

The Costa Mesa Historical Society is currently accepting nominations for the Living Memorial Award. The award is presented to an individual:

- Who has given **volunteer service** over a period of time.
- Who has made a **creative contribution of historic value**.

Those wishing to nominate someone to receive the Living Memorial Award should submit a letter to the Costa Mesa Historical Society. The letter should state the nominee's full name, some information about the individual, their achievements, and why the nominee is deserving of the award. The recipient(s) will be selected by the Board of Directors.

Please address the letter to:

Living Memorial Award
Board of Directors
Costa Mesa Historical Society
P.O. Box 1764
Costa Mesa, CA 92628

Left: The pine memorializing Bessie Lounsberry (Living Memorial Award 1973) welcomes visitors to Estancia Park's Memorial Garden. Turn the page to learn more about this remarkable woman.

Happy (Re)birthday, Diego Sepulveda Adobe!

August 28 marks the 52nd anniversary of the restoration of the Diego Sepulveda Adobe. Originally built in the early 1800s as an outpost for vaqueros from Mission San Juan Capistrano, the adobe is not just Costa Mesa's oldest building, it's one of the oldest in Orange County.

In 1961 clapboard walls that had been built around the original building caught fire, reminding historians, among others, of the adobe structure beneath. The Segerstrom family donated the adobe's 5-acre site to the city the next year. The city, led by assistant city engineer George

Madsen, restored the structure under the direction of the Costa Mesa Historical Society. Some reconstruction was necessary, but the restoration and furnishing process employed period methods wherever possible. The project was a resounding success. An estimated 700 people toured the "estancia" during the first open house in August 1966.

In 2012 Mexican artisans made further restorations. Floors were sealed, walls whitewashed, and exhibits updated, thus preserving the California landmark for a new generation.

SAVE THE DATE

THE 71ST ANNUAL
COSTA MESA-NEWPORT HARBOR
LIONS CLUB

FISH FRY

SEPTEMBER 21-23

AT FAIRVIEW PARK

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Bessie Lounsberry: A Remarkable Woman
The Shamrock: Costa Mesa's First Cocktail Bar

Promoting and preserving Costa Mesa's history is our mission

FAIRVIEW REGISTER, FAIRVIEW, LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, MARCH 2, 1889

Bessie Lounsberry:
**A Most Remarkable
Woman**

Bessie Nell (White) Lounsberry (1886-1972) made many important contributions to the civic life of 1930s-50s Costa Mesa. She compiled the city directory, worked local elections, and served on the Costa Mesa Citizen's Council, along with other volunteer roles. Her seven-year beautification campaign led to the planting of 1,026 trees. She was honored for her decades of selfless service with the Costa Mesa Historical Society's second Living Memorial Award in 1973.

Bessie was born in Alpena in the Dakota Territory. She graduated from the Wessington Springs Seminary, then found work as a bank clerk. She soon met Harry C. "Clem" Lounsberry, a newspaperman, and the two married in 1908.

The promises of speculators and virgin land lured the newlyweds south of the Black Hills to the Nebraska border. Their property lay 16 miles from town, with only a dozen people within 5 miles. Perhaps this is where Bessie began to develop her reputation as someone who "likes the great outdoors, sleeping under the stars on a brisk night, or cooking over a campfire."

Neither of the "sodbusters" had any experience with homesteading. They learned as they went. They grew crops and raised livestock, and built a dam to save themselves the 10-mile trek for water when the creek ran dry. They built their 8x14 cabin when Bessie was pregnant with their daughter, Nell. Bessie gathered corn until the day before she gave birth, then again a week after, and never saw a doctor the entire term, including at birth. She took Nell to be weighed two weeks later, sliding her on a grocery scale at a store three miles away.

The Lounsberrys lived happily on the homestead until 1923. But when neighbors moved to Costa Mesa, they followed. They earned money on the five-month trip by picking fruit and saved it by camping. When they arrived in Newport Beach that winter, young Nell made money selling seashells.

The family would undertake the arduous trip back to the homestead several times, but California became their home. For much of the twenties they wintered in Newport Beach then earned money the rest of the year picking fruit across the state. They settled permanently in Costa Mesa at the end of 1930.

Around the same time, Nell's seashell hobby became a full-fledged family business: the West Coast Curio Company. Bessie loved it, worked hard at it, and was proud of what would become the largest business of its kind. They sold a variety of curios, from urchins and rattlesnakes to gold-rush relics. Along the way, the Lounsberrys perfected a method for preserving starfish that retained their color. Customers would include Knott's and Disneyland, and their specimens were displayed as far away as Ohio State University and the Smithsonian.

Meanwhile, Nell married an amateur archeologist and traveled with him across California. Bessie and Clem visited them in gold country. Never one to relax, Bessie soon joined in the hunt for gold, carrying a pan and sluice box.

Life stabilized but didn't slow down when Nell worked as a reporter and editor for the *Globe-Herald* and *Newport Balboa Press*



Bessie Lounsberry sits among her curios in 1957.

from 1937-1945. The untiring Bessie managed the publications' circulation and advertising.

In the 1930s Bessie dove into civic work. From 1937-1951 she singlehandedly gathered the names, addresses, and sponsors for the city directory, all without pay. Part yellow pages, part white pages, part community history, the directory provided an invaluable resource for newcomers and old-timers alike.

Bessie also promoted voter registration, worked election precincts, and served on election boards through the 1940s and 50s, including as judge. At one point her district earned a commendation for its 94.07% turnout. Politically Bessie supported the re-elections of Congressman John Phillips and Governor Earl Warren (later the 14th Chief Justice of the United States), and in 1953 she sat on a committee opposing incorporation.

From 1950-57 Bessie led the beautification committee of the Costa Mesa Citizen's Council. Her scrapbooks, photo albums, and detailed notes record her successes. By the time the city took over in 1957, she had helped plant 1026 trees: Pink Locusts, Brazilian Peppers, Flowering Eucalypti, Jacarandas, and more. Her committee also worked to remove eyesores, paint old houses, and fight against a proposed dump. But by the end of the decade, she was forced to retire due to poor health.

Bessie stayed busy, though, running the curio shop and traveling. Over the years Bessie had joined Nell on trips to San Clemente Island, up and down California, throughout the Southwest, and famously, on a 30,000 mile journey through Mexico — always collecting specimens for the shop. At 76 she and Nell took their second road trip to the Yucatan, British Honduras (Belize), and Guatemala — yet another 10,000 miles. The pair donated 350 garments and 100 lbs. worth of toys, crayons, paper, and thread to the poor they met there.

Bessie died in 1972 at the age of 85. The following year she was honored with a Living Memorial Award by the Costa Mesa Historical Society. In addition to the above accomplishments, she was memorialized for her "foresight in anticipating the present interest in ecology and trees." Her living symbol, a towering Torrey pine, welcomes visitors daily to Estancia Park's memorial garden.

After Bessie's death, Goldie TeWinkle phoned Nell to talk about the old days and the loved ones who had passed away. Goldie called Bessie "the most remarkable woman I have ever known." Nell added in her diary, "I think so, too." ■



An August 1980 shot of The Shamrock, later The Helm, at 1824 Newport. Today it is a retro lounge, The Boulevard.

The Shamrock, Costa Mesa's First Cocktail Bar

Costa Mesa's first cocktail bar opened at 1824 Newport in August 1944. The bar, first called the Shamrock and later the Helm, survived nearly seven decades before closing in August 2011.

The Shamrock's story nearly ended before it began. Protests were held, editorials written, and petitions circulated to block its opening. Foes argued "the town already has a sufficient number of liquor-selling establishments to adequately supply the needs of the citizenry." A. L. Pinkley opposed its nearness to his child-friendly drug store. And W. Carl Spencer worried about "drunken military brawls" that would lead to "Costa Mesa being declared 'out-of-bounds' for the decent and respectable soldiers at the base."

After several months of hearings the Board of Equalization finally approved the liquor license. Opponents' fears appear to have been unfounded. No drunken brawls, at least, were ever recorded.

The new owners added \$5,000 worth of improvements, including a glass-back bar, "soft carpeting," and booths "for the convenience of patrons." "The smartest new café" promised "food that will please the most discriminating and the finest mixed drinks."

The Shamrock soon expanded, adding a dining room in the former Fairview

Water Co.'s space. Later the Mesa Liquor Co. became Shamrock Liquor. "Plenty of Whiskey," it advertised.

The Shamrock was located near the Alpha Beta market at the former home of the Gingham Café. In the 1920s, the location had been the site of Rehme's Garage and the Mesa Tavern.

The lounge specialized in its early years in deluxe steak and chicken dinners. Holidays were a big deal, too. You could enjoy a Thanksgiving turkey dinner for \$1.50 or party "from morning till night" on St. Patrick's Day. By 1954, live music became a fixture when "One Man Trio" Bob Noble played 6 nights a week.

Owners came and went over time, and its footprint shrank and grew. In the 1980s the bar was renamed the Helm.

The bar closed in 2011 after 67 years. The landlord, Robert "Zeb" Ziemer, was forced to raise the rent, he claimed, after being sued for an alleged violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ziemer's lawyer called the lawsuit the work of a "professional plaintiff" as the man had simultaneously sued four other historic bars for similar infractions occurring the same day. The case was dismissed in December without a settlement, but the result came too late for Costa Mesa's oldest cocktail bar. ■

Shop with us on Amazon

Every time you start your order with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate to the Costa Mesa Historical Society. Visit smileamazon.com before making your next purchase, being sure to check "charitable organization" and selecting the Costa Mesa Historical Society when prompted. You can use your existing Amazon account on AmazonSmile.

New Business Membership Level

For the first time, memberships for the life of a business are available for \$1,000. To join, please fill out the membership form on the back of this newsletter or call us at 949-631-5918.

Dues Overdue?

Make sure your dues are up to date by looking at your **dues expiration date** on the address label to the right of your name. If your dues are due, mail in a check, c/o Susan Weeks, Treasurer, or drop it off on a Thursday or Friday from 10am to 3pm. Membership dues are listed on the back page.

Make a Difference – Volunteer

We're looking for a volunteer to **set up refreshments** at our monthly programs as well as members to sit on two committees: the **Newsletter Assembly Committee** prepares the newsletter for mailing, while the **Adobe Committee** recruits volunteers to plan an event, become a docent, or work on exhibits. Committees meet monthly and are chaired by board members. Interested? Call us at 949-631-5918. Isn't it more fun to work as a team?

Share Your Story

We'd love to hear your Costa Mesa stories. Many changes have taken place and we want to hear from those who lived through them. Write the memories yourself or come to the museum and we'll transcribe them for you. It's that simple!

Temporary Parking Instructions

Please enter the parking lot serving our society, the Donald Dungan Library, and the Recreation Center by entering from Park Avenue only, not Anaheim. The Anaheim entrance is completely blocked off.

ROBERTO'S AUTO TRIM

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V I S I T U S

Diego Sepulveda Adobe

1900 Adams Ave.

Open 12-4 p.m. the 1st and 3rd Saturdays*

Explore centuries of history when you visit one of Orange County's oldest buildings in its gorgeous setting at Estancia Park.

Costa Mesa Historical Society Museum

1870 Anaheim Ave.

Open 10am-3pm Thursdays and Fridays*

View a mind-boggling array of artifacts from 5,000 years of Costa Mesa history – from the first peoples to the City of the Arts.

* Or schedule an appointment at 949-631-5918.

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P.O. Box 1764
Costa Mesa, CA 92628**

— Membership Form —

Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Membership Categories

Annual		Lifetime	
Individual	\$20.00	Individual Life Member	\$500.00
Individual Senior (60+)	\$15.00	Business Life Member	\$1,000.00
Family	\$25.00		
Student (under 16)	\$10.00		
Contributing	\$50.00	Special	
Business and Professional	\$100.00	SAAAB Wing Annual Member	\$10.00
Public Agency	\$100.00		
Benefactor	\$250.00		

Make your checks payable to the Costa Mesa Historical Society.
The Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, operates under the Corporation Laws of the State of California.