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High Society

La Jolla: A Celebration of Its Past

Barbara Dawson, a La Jollan since 1921, seemed the right person to ask the question: Have strangers' reactions changed much over the years when you tell them where you live?

The 85-year-old answered with a question of her own: "You mean some of those people who say, 'Oh, you're one of the rich ones'?"

The question remained unanswered. Has that *always* been the reaction? "No, it's fairly recent, as San Diego has grown. It's people in San Diego who make remarks like that. And it's not true. I mean, there are people here with money, but there are an awful lot of people who don't have it, too."

LOCAL EVENTS

Born in London in 1917, Dawson is neither a have nor a have-not. Maybe she's best described as a have-enough. When Dawson was three, her parents moved to San Diego at the urging of an uncle, who had arrived a few years earlier and done well for himself as the manager of a downtown hotel. "We left from Liverpool," said Dawson. (She had run in from her garden on Fay Avenue to answer the phone.) "We crossed the Atlantic, traveled down the St. Lawrence Seaway, then by train we went from Detroit straight to San Diego. We had one little trunk for all our belongings."

When they got here, Dawson's father started a paint business in La Jolla. After graduating from college, Dawson became a teacher and then administrator in the San Diego public schools. "I taught at Lincoln High School when it first opened," said Dawson. "I have taught every grade level, and practically every subject."

In 1963, Dawson heard that her fifth-grade teacher at La Jolla Elementary School was starting the La Jolla Historical Society. Dawson volunteered her help. "I was handed the gavel..." — she became the society's first president. Asked if many people back then wondered if La Jolla had enough history to warrant a society, she said, "Well, they didn't wonder anymore after we got through with them."

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM *LA JOLLA: A CELEBRATION OF ITS PAST*

View of La Jolla Shores from Mt. Soledad, c. 1925

As a society member, Dawson began collecting photographs of early La Jolla. Today she has a large collection of historic images: buildings, landscapes, and local personalities. Just last week, dozens of the pictures were published in a book, *La Jolla: A Celebration of Its Past.*

In the earliest of these views, from the 1890s, La Jolla looks about as populated as San Felipe. In the 1920s, a building up on rollers is moved through deserted streets. Palm trees, shown as seedlings in 1928, today reach the third floor of downtown La Jolla's Bank of America.

Hotel Cabrillo, 1908

Dawson said she acquired many of the photographs from the man whose father established the Cabrillo Hotel in 1909. (The Cabrillo is now the west wing of La Valencia, the "Pink Lady" on Prospect Street.) Dawson took "tons and tons" of photos of her own. Was she acting consciously as a documentarist? "I just did what needed to be done," said Dawson, who has also tape-recorded 65 oral histories of La Jollans.

The bulk of the new book's text was written by native La Jollan Patricia Daly-Lipe. Its genesis was a series of articles for *La Jolla Village News.* Daly-Lipe was born in 1942, after her father came here to design airplanes for Convair. Asked whom she envisioned as the book's potential audience — beyond La Jollans, that is — she said, "I can't remember who nominated La Jolla as being the best place in the United States to live in and to visit. If it is — and, of course, to us it is — then I think everyone would be interested to know how it all came to be."

And yet Daly-Lipe said that she and Dawson did not want the book to be unrelieved boosterism. "La Jolla is wonderful, but it did have a few little flaws. Every city does. And anti-Semitism was one of those flaws. It's part of La Jolla's history, and we decided we didn't want to hide anything." So Mary Ellen Stratthaus's "Flaw in the Jewel: Housing Discrimination against Jews in La Jolla" is excerpted.

Certain "unacceptable" types of visitors were once barred from La Jolla, too, Stratthaus writes, to illustrate the lengths to which La Jollans went to preserve their "town's unique personality." During World War II, La Jolla women "obstructed visits from some of the 35,000 or so military personnel who came through San Diego for training or deployment by barricading Torrey Pines Road, the northern entry into the village."

Exactly how these women erected and staffed their barricades isn't revealed.

You can ask Dawson and Daly-Lipe for more details this weekend at La Jolla's well-known local bookshop, D.G. Wills, where they will sign copies and lead a discussion.

Longtime La Jollan Cliff Robertson contributed an essay, too. The actor, who came to La Jolla as an infant in the 1920s, writes of his "jewel" today: "Though she has her share of greed-seekers and she has lost much of her innocence, she is still my home."

— *Jeanne Schinto*

Book-signing and discussion:
"La Jolla: A Celebration of Its Past"
Friday, August 30, 7:00 p.m.
D.G. Wills Books
7461 Girard Avenue, La Jolla
Free
Info: 858-456-1800