

# Balboa Island Museum & Historical Society

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FOUNDED 2000

VOLUME 9

## “OVER THE BRIDGE” THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

By Jennifer & Cindy Keil

Sisters Jennifer and Cindy Keil have a passion for documenting oral histories and are assisting the Museum in gathering stories from Balboa Island residents. Jennifer was just awarded her Master of Arts Degree in History, with an emphasis in Public and Oral History. Cindy is earning her Master of Arts in English.

We met with Museum Board Members Ed Trainor and Bob Dennerline to discuss launching an Oral History project to capture memories of days gone by. As Master's degree students at California State University, Fullerton, the faculty at the Center for Oral and Public History taught us how to conduct interviews, and we implemented a sustainable program that can continue to record conversations from Island residents. Tina Wayt, a wonderful BIMHS volunteer, opened the Museum for us and assisted in securing the narrators. Being passionate about the Oral History craft, we collaborated on how we could use this material in video form for the Oral History station [to be established in the near future] so these recollections will be available to Museum visitors.

We interviewed 23 Island residents ranging in age from 64 to 96 years. Through the process, the BIMHS Oral History Project captured the essential changes that occurred over time in this vibrant community. The Island took on its own personality and was transformed by its people. It experienced dramatic change from early developers, Pasadena visitors and World War II blackouts, and became a permanent lively community. Some narrators' families intended just to come for a summer rental and then decided that this would be their permanent home. If walls could speak, the historic cottages and modernized homes would contain a multitude of stories.

We have begun to uncover these rich stories by speaking with their residents. Alice Dear said, "I came here at the end of my honeymoon and never left. I've lived in the same house for 60 years!"

We learned how the businesses shaped the Island culture. Each week that we met, new aspects to the Island were revealed and we laughed over fun stories. Narrators shared many fond

memories of the Jolly Roger, Dad's Ice Cream, Hershey's Market, the Ferry, and the hardware store. For the Pearl Girls, the street on which they reared their children and created a flag raising song made them connect to the community. Neighbors are practically family in this setting; generations of children have grown up together and have continued to reside here.

Maxwell Phillips said, "Balboa Island is really a small town. People come into my store and have always asked me, 'How can you live so close to each other?' And my answer is we don't live in our houses, we live outside. We sleep in our houses but we have the biggest pool in the world and we have the friendliest neighbors in the world."

One of the most celebrated memories is the homecoming as people drove over the bridge. "My husband was a football coach and teacher in the Anaheim District and up there it was a totally different life," said Alice Dear. "When he would come over the bridge to the Island, he'd pick up his other life here at home. And I've heard so

many people say the same thing. When they come from work and onto the Island, they live in a different world here, and it's a lovely, lovely world."

The collective celebration of holidays such as the Fourth of July and Christmas Boat Parade hold a special meaning for Islanders.

Participant Joyce Harris said, "I couldn't list all the fun things we've had here. The Fourth of July got all the family here and the fireworks and everything—it's pretty special."

We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this process and look forward to sharing these stories with you. The Oral History station will be established inside the Museum in the near future and we hope you will enjoy watching and listening to the interviews that we were able to conduct.

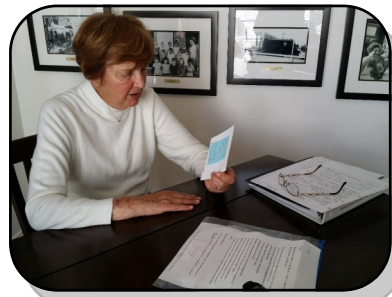
The Museum thanks the Keil sisters, Tina Wayt and Peggy Marotta for their tireless efforts to make the Oral History Project a reality. We also thank the contributors who have shared their priceless stories about the early days on Balboa Island.



Cindy Keil



Maxwell Phillips has lots of stories to tell!



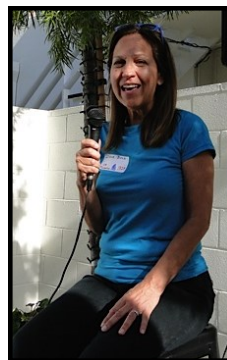
Hanne Parks shares her memories



Alice Dear being interviewed by Jennifer Keil

# Celebrating Island Homes With Historic Plaques

May 10th, 2014



## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Ed Trainor

One of the best jobs on Balboa Island is just an application away! Being a volunteer is one of the best jobs, so long as you don't mind getting paid in smiles and thanks. As a Museum volunteer you will have the opportunity to meet local residents as well as visitors from all over the world. We welcome you to join our Museum family and help keep the Balboa Island Museum one of the best attractions in the city!

We offer two shifts during our regular business hours.

Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday

10 am - 1 pm, 1 pm - 4 pm

Applications are available at the Museum and on our website, [www.balboaislandmuseum.org](http://www.balboaislandmuseum.org). Please contact Sue Sibley at 916-799-6053 for more information.

### THANKS TO YOU!

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to everyone who generously supports the work we do to collect, preserve and share the history of Balboa Island.

Through your membership and additional gifts, you help the Museum to gather and protect the amazing stories and history of Balboa Island.

**Be a part of Balboa Island history**  
**Renew or become a member**  
**Application enclosed**

Editorial contributions by Shirley Pepys and Ellen Goodman

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## HISTORIC HOMES ON THE ISLAND

Diane Bock

There are 1,444 homes on Balboa Island, and out of these, 135 bear a plaque engraved with the words *Balboa Island Historical Society* and the date that the house was built. About 300 more houses qualify to be recognized as a "historic home" and the BI Museum & Historical Society invites home owners to consider purchasing a plaque. In order to qualify, the structure must have been constructed at least 60 years ago (currently 1954 or earlier.)



117 Turquoise, Historic Plaque date 1912

Sixty five of the owners of Balboa Island's Historic Homes gathered at the Museum on May 10th to share their pride in the significance (and charm!) of their vintage Balboa Island homes. Don Abrams presented some of his favorite mem-



Collins Castle

ories of Balboa Island's cottages from the earliest days and he was followed by Jan Benner, our newest (and oldest) Historic Home Owner. Jan and her husband, John, very recently purchased 117 Turquoise (#4) - this property bears the Historic Homes plaque with the earliest date: 1912. Wine and cheese were served; old connections were renewed and new friends were made.



The White Swan

One of the first homes on the Island was built in 1907, designed for the original land developer, W.S. Collins. It was constructed for Collins' 4th wife, Apolena, and appropriately named, "Collins Castle." The house was rented by the ill-fated comedian, Fatty Arbuckle, around 1921. Collins Castle was torn down in 1953; Collins had died the year before. In its stead, eight new houses were erected on what is now called Collins Island. The "White Swan" was the second house built on the Island at the west side of Pearl and the South Bay Front. It was owned by Collins' second wife, Jessie.

### About the Museum

Founded in 2000, the Balboa Island Museum & Historical Society provides a place for Islanders and visitors to gather and share the history and heritage of this beloved location. Donations are tax deductible. Volunteers are desired. Contributions of photos, memorable stories and artifacts depicting Island life are welcomed.

**Hours:** Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun, 10 am - 4 pm  
 331 Marine Ave., Balboa Island, CA 92662  
[info@balboaislandmuseum.org](mailto:info@balboaislandmuseum.org)

**949-675-3952**

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