

1991-2021 History of the Laguna Beach Historical Society

(There was a previous historical society in Laguna Beach, “Laguna Beach Community Historical Society”, which began in 1971, but it abruptly closed in the early 1980s. Jane Janz and Richard Ayotte spent a great deal of time and effort salvaging documents, photos, and paraphernalia the previous historical society had collected. Many of those items were merged with the archives that the current Laguna Beach Historical Society has collected.)

TIMELINE (highlights according to the newsletters... by no means fully inclusive...)

1991 MAY

According to Karen Turnbull: Richard Ayotte, Michael Onorato, and she got together to discuss the establishment of a new historical society for Laguna Beach. They are gratified at the interest and enthusiasm of the people who come to their first meetings, showing concern that Laguna’s unique heritage is celebrated and preserved.

1992 JANUARY

The first newsletter of the Laguna Beach Historical Society is published.

Karen Turnbull declares, “We want to firmly establish the LBHS as an integral part of our community. We want to offer programs and activities that members of the community will find worthwhile and enriching. We strongly support the establishment of a local history room at the public library.” Karen continues, “We have been in communication with Wells Fargo Bank concerning Blanche Clapp Smith’s house at 278 Ocean Avenue, now in possession of the bank since Mrs. Smith’s death last year (in 1991). “We visualize it as an ideal location for a Laguna Beach history museum where the Historical Society could present exhibits relating to Laguna’s history.”

The following officers are elected by the first Board of Directors:

President — Anne Frank

VP — Jim Davison

Secretary — David Wilson

Treasurer — Pauline Buzan

Librarian/Archivist — Richard Ayotte

Directors — Jane Janz, Michael Onorato, Marguerite Stanton

Newsletter — Karen Turnbull

Membership categories: Individual \$15, Couple \$25, Student \$5, Organization \$50, Life \$200, Patron \$500.

1992 FEBRUARY

The Historical Society hosts the first speaker to present information about Laguna Beach history to its members. Ellen Lee speaks about Madame Modjeska, an internationally famous Polish actress who settled in Orange County, California. She had a spectacular home in Modjeska Canyon and had many ties to Laguna Beach.

With help from the Historical Society, a local history corner was established in the Laguna Beach Library.

1992 MAY

Laguna Beach celebrates the second annual Laguna Beach Heritage Month, planned by the city's Heritage Committee. The Historical Society participates with a program about Laguna's pottery industries in the 1940s. Meetings and programs are held at Wells Fargo Bank meeting room.

The Historical Society solicits old photos and artifacts to present at open programs and to help expand the archives. The Historical Society continues to correspond with Wells Fargo concerning the use of the Smith House as a Laguna Beach history museum and tourist information center.

1992 JULY

The following is published in the historical society newsletter.:

LAGUNA BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LAGUNA BEACH IS A SPECIAL PLACE, A TOWN UNLIKE ANY OTHER IN ORANGE COUNTY. COME LEARN ABOUT OUR CITY'S COLORFUL PAST.

THE LAGUNA BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S PURPOSE IS TO ACCUMULATE, RECORD AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TOWN'S UNIQUE HISTORY.

IF YOU JOIN THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, YOU CAN

- *LEARN THE INTERESTING BACKGROUND OF THIS UNUSUAL COMMUNITY.*
- *GET THE REGULAR NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING LAGUNA HISTORY AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS*
- *RESEARCH A SPECIAL TOPIC IN THE HISTORY OF THE TOWN*
- *HELP IDENTIFY AND SAVE LAGUNA'S HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS*
- *HELP BUILD A COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH MATERIALS AT THE LAGUNA BEACH PUBLIC LIBRARY.*

WE'RE JUST BEGINNING. WE'D LOVE TO HAVE YOU JOIN AND HELP US WITH OUR PROJECTS.

1992 SEPTEMBER

Wells Fargo Bank decides to lease the Smith House to the Laguna Beach Historical Society which will share the space with the Chamber of Commerce's Hospitality Association—renovation plans begin. The Laguna Beach Historical Society receives preliminary tax-exempt status. Contributions, gifts, bequests, etc. to the society are now tax deductible.

1992 NOVEMBER

An Open House is planned for the Smith Cottage at 278 Ocean Ave for “before renovation” tours. Wells Fargo has agreed to lease the property to the historical society for one dollar a year. The Historical Society will be responsible for taxes, utilities, and upkeep.

1993 MAY

The Historical Society celebrates Heritage Month with a program about “Kitschi Manido”, an Indian Pageant performed in Laguna Beach during the 1920s as a benefit for the Art Association.

1993 FALL

The Hospitality Association decides to pursue alternative offices leaving the Historical Society to fund the Smith House on its own. The Historical Society requests \$15,000 in funding from the City of Laguna Beach. The Society solicits donations of additional funding, as well as time, skills, and materials from members of the community. Work parties are planned.

Society members work on transcribing oral histories obtained in the 1970s by the Laguna Beach community. The Historical Society continues to solicit donations for archival material and photos.

The Historical Society has 150 paid members. The five-year plan is to increase this to 1,000 members.

1994 SPRING

Public meetings for the Historical Society are held at several different locations including the Hotel Firenze, Wells Fargo Bank, and Hotel Del Camino. Saturday work parties continue for plumbing, electrical and yard work, but volunteers are sparse, possibly because “everyone is so darned busy recovering from their own problems.” (This is in reference to the fire that devastated the town on October 27, 1993.) In addition, the newsletter states, “The Homeless keep breaking in and vandalizing the house, including using every room as a privy.”

The Historical Society has 190 paid members.

1994 JULY

“Doc” Blacketer makes repairs at the Murphy Smith Bungalow to the roof, eaves, plumbing, interior walls, ceilings, kitchen, and bath. The original wood floors are sanded, stained, and receive four coats of finish. Work parties are held every Saturday from 9AM to 2PM. The newsletter states, “Bring paint scrapers, gardening tools, large garbage bags, gloves, and a picnic lunch and join us for a “Tom Sawyer” party.”

The Historical Society has 210 paid members.

1994 FALL

“Doc” Blacketer continues to work on renovations at the Smith house. The unseasonable heat all summer slows the work, but “the inside is done.”

Membership Cards are mailed to all members to be used as a pass to visit the house.

1995 APRIL

A tri-fold brochure on the Murphy Smith Bungalow is created. A lack of funds necessitates a short newsletter.

1995 AUGUST

The Murphy Smith Bungalow officially opens to the public on August 22, 1995. Volunteer docents (two shifts per day) will be there on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 11AM to 4PM.

The Historical Society’s 400 members donate about \$15 each per year which brings in donations of approximately \$6,000 a year. These funds pay for expenses at the Murphy Smith Bungalow and six newsletters a year.

1995 JULY

The newsletter sub-headline states, “The Historical Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt, non-political community organization committed to preserving the places, things, and memories of Laguna Beach.” There are four booklets on Laguna History available at the Murphy-Smith Bungalow, each available for \$3.

- *A Short History of Laguna Beach*, by Karen Wilson Turnbull
- *History of Laguna Canyon*, by Belinda Blacketer
- *The Glorious Fourth in Old Laguna*, by Jane Janz
- *Brayton Pottery*, by Belinda Blacketer

1997 DECEMBER to 1998 JANUARY

Jane Janz and Belinda Blacketer are spending many days sorting, cataloging, and filing documents that have been donated to the Society. The archives stored at Wells Fargo Bank include personal papers, photos, scrapbooks, magazines, newspapers, etc.

The Historical Society goes online... as an “experiment.” Visitors to the site submit questions about relatives who lived in Laguna and historical events. <http://freeyellow.com/members/laguna/index.html>

2002 SPRING

The Historical Society continues to collect archival donations and present historical programs to its members and the public. The Murphy Smith Bungalow is open to the public at no charge every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1PM to 4PM. Wells

Fargo continues to renew the lease for the house for a three-year lease. The Historical Society programs are held at the Laguna Beach City Hall Council Chambers.

2004

The Laguna Beach Historical Society website is at lagunahistory.org.

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2005 SPRING

The newsletter states, "The Laguna Beach Historical Society is an all-volunteer non-profit civic organization dedicated to preserve historical information and artifacts of Laguna Beach and to accurately disseminate information regarding the important heritage of Laguna Beach."

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2007 MARCH

President's Message by Kimberly Stuart

It takes a team to keep things going so I would like to send huge thank you's to our Board of Directors and volunteers:

- ✓ Gene Felder - for his years of dedication to the Laguna Beach Historical Society and our community, his proactive public relations work and tracking of finances for the LBHS.
- ✓ Anne Frank – for her professional, thoughtful advice regarding historic structures and processes, and support of LBHS activities.
- ✓ John Hoover – for his warm, ever present smile, solid supporter of the LBHS, and being a people networking machine.
- ✓ Jane Janz - for the fun she has researching and coordinating our wonderful programs and interesting window displays.
- ✓ Eric Jessen – for supporting the existence and presence of the LBHS in our community, and for being an incredible resource and participant in Orange County and Laguna Beach historic memory.
- ✓ Ed Perry – A most reliable volunteer and in maintaining the board members perspective of time and priorities.
- ✓ Vern Spitaleri – A great resource of historic memory and humor.
- ✓ Kevin Spencer – for his willingness to participate and draw volunteers to the Murphy Smith Bungalow.
- ✓ Nelda Stone – For keeping the meeting minutes and the board members up to date.
- ✓ Georgina Valdez - for a great job keeping the Murphy Smith Bungalow charming inside and out, all year long and her dedication to preserving our Laguna Beach heritage.
- ✓ Victoria Winters – For keeping track of the list of historic buildings in town and for promoting the LBHS with other organizations

2007 MAY

The Laguna Beach Garden Club contributes "a wonderful palette of plant materials and tremendous assistance from a great crew of volunteers who have generously given their time and energy to revitalize the gardens of the Murphy Smith Bungalow."

2008 APRIL

The Historical Society is fortunate to receive a donation from Thomas "Tom" Pulley as he allows us to scan hundreds of historical postcards including images of historical Laguna Beach from his postcard collection.

2011 SEPTEMBER

Historical photos are available online from the Historical Society for a small fee to cover costs of the website. The Murphy Smith Bungalow receives new exterior paint. The Bungalow continues to be open to the public every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1PM to 4PM.

2012 NOVEMBER

DVDs of past Laguna Beach Historical Society programs are now available at the Murphy Smith Bungalow for a \$6 donation. The interior of the Murphy Smith Bungalow receives improvement to the interior with period-appropriate painting, furniture, clothing, and framing.

2014 MAY

The Laguna Beach Historical Society website is available at its new location: lagunabeachhistory.org

The Historical Society makes its first Facebook post.

The Historical Society joins community programs where the public can give support to the Historical Society including “Amazon Smile Designated Charity”, “Ralphs Community Contribution Program”. (Amazon and Ralphs gives a portion of the amount spent by supporters to the Historical Society.)

2014 JUNE

The Laguna Beach Historical Society makes its first post on Instagram.

Historical Society photos are now available on lagunabeachhistory.smugmug.com

2014 AUGUST

Historical Society video presentations are now available on our YouTube channel.

The Historical Society now accepts online donations through PayPal.

2018 APRIL

The location of the Historical Society presentations is changed from the City Council Chambers to the Susi Q community center. (The City of Laguna Beach no longer allows use of the city building for non-government use.)

2021 JULY — UPDATE

The Murphy Smith Bungalow, closed for quarantine from March 2020 to July 2021 because of the COVID 19 pandemic. It opens to the public with volunteer docents scheduled on Fridays and Saturdays from 1PM-4PM.

Board meetings have taken place virtually on Zoom during the pandemic, and will hopefully resume in person in September of 2021.

The last in-person program took place on March 5, 2020 on “The Historic Sewage Treatment Plant (AKA ‘The Digester’)”. A program planned in 2020 but cancelled

because of quarantine was to be titled, “The History of the Pacific Marine Mammal Center”. This program has not yet been rescheduled.

During quarantine, several Historical Society Board participated in a Zoom Webinar about Laguna Beach history coordinated by Laguna Beach High School history teacher, Shelby Anderson.

Also during quarantine, the Laguna Beach Historical society hosted a Zoom Webinar about Alice Miller Richardson, a pioneer and early businesswoman during the early days of Laguna Beach, by Barbara Ann Burns.

In-person programs are planned to resume in November of 2021 with a presentation about Red Guyer, a former coach at Laguna Beach High School by Glenna Matthews.

As of July 2021, The Laguna Beach Historical Society has approximately 2400 followers on Facebook and 1500 followers on Instagram. The Society receives about 500 views per day of our photos on SmugMug and 500-1000 visitors per month on our website.