

Welcome to the Larabee House at San Diego Botanic Garden

This small museum reflects some of the interests, people and places that were part of the lives of Ruth Baird Larabee (1904-1969) and Charles Wright Larabee, (1901-1968) who originated San Diego Botanic Garden. It is not intended to tell their entire life stories. Those unusual and complicated events are recounted in the book entitled, "Sowing Seeds of Wonder," on sale in The Gift Shops. The Larabees' primary contribution is, of course, outside in the Garden; their secondary contribution could be said to have been their dedication to Scout groups.

1.) Painting by Julia Luippold of the "Larabee House on the Avocado Ranch"

- a. Julia Luippold was a gardening friend of Ruth Larabee.
- b. This painting shows approximately how the house looked around 1956, although it was not pink, but light brown (artistic license.)
- c. The house was built in 1917 by Donald C. Ingersoll and his wife Gertrude (Nanette.) It was purchased in 1923 by Anton van Amersfoort, a prominent avocado farmer who lived here until 1943.
- d. Ruth Larabee bought this house and the two parcels which made up the 27 acre estate in 1943, for the sum of \$10 each.
- e. Ruth and Charles Larabee loved Latin cultures. When they arrived here in 1943, the Larabees built the adobe wall. The fireplace and adobe walls were whitewashed. Together with the rustic wooden gates, Spanish tiles and Moorish window in the wall, the overall feeling was of Spanish Colonial architecture, like something you might have seen in Rancho Santa Fe at the time.
- f. The Larabees plastered the interior walls, added wainscoting and wooden floors, and built the bookcases that enclose and frame the fireplace. The house was originally less than 1,000 square feet, was very dark inside and filled with antique furnishings.
- g. Charles Larabee lived here from 1943 to 1950, when they divorced. Ruth stayed until 1957.
- h. Note the open front porch, with a backcountry view to the east. This was enclosed sometime in the 1960s by the County, after Ruth gave her property to them in 1957. The porch is going to be opened again and restored to something like the original, sometime in 2017/18, as part of a County improvement project. There will be an opportunity for more interpretive signs about the Larabees along with that project.

2.) Ruth Larabee and Camp Fire Girls

- a. Ruth Baird Larabee hand made this Camp Fire Girls gown in 1918, when she was 14 years old and attained the rank of Torch Bearer. (The ankle-length gown has been folded up for the purpose of this display.) She was devoted to the Camp Fire traditions and was one of its earliest members.
- b. The label shows her maiden name, "Ruth Baird." You can see she handstitched an image of herself standing at the prow of a Native American canoe. (Canoes often had sails for going out into open lakes.) Growing up in a wooded property in Kansas City, Missouri, she was particularly fond of water and sailing.
- c. Photos left of the gown show Ruth Larabee with the Camp Fire Girls when she became a leader in the early 1950s. (She had been a Girl Scout leader prior to this, in the late 1940s.) Charles Larabee was Scout Executive of a troop of Explorer (Senior) Boy Scouts during the same period. Since they did not have children of their own, they dedicated themselves to sharing their love for the outdoors with these youth groups.
- d. The upper photo shows a Camp Fire ceremony here on the property in 1953. Ruth Larabee is on the far right, wearing the very same Camp Fire gown, but at this time as an adult.
- e. The lower photo shows the Camp Fire group posing on the bluff behind the porch, following a trip to Baja.

3.) Bookcases

- a. These items are intended to represent what they may have had on their book shelves. None of them is an original. We have no exact record of what was actually here. When Ruth Larabee left the ranch in haste in 1957, she packed all of her belongings and stowed them in the Lawn House. It is assumed the County of San Diego later dispatched of these things.
- b. The books are all from the period of the 1940s- to 1950s, when the Larabees lived here. A few are titles that we know they actually did read.
- c. Take time to look at the photos of Ruth Baird (Robertson's) parents on the left bookcase, and Charles Larabee's ancestors on the right.
- d. Ruth and Charles were both independently wealthy in their thirties. Charles Larabee's father and uncle created Larabee Flour Mills in Kansas, a hugely prosperous business that made them—and Charles—multi-millionaires. Ruth Baird's father was a very successful banker in Kansas City, and invested in thousands of acres of land in Texas, hence her enormous inheritance as well.

- e. We do know that the Larabees decorated this room with arts and crafts from Navajo traditions. In addition, they collected blackware or “black-on-black” pottery, recreated from ancient traditions by the famous Navajo artist Maria Martinez from the San Ildefonso Pueblo near Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- f. The painting by Dorothy Telford in 1983 provides another glimpse of the house and the lush gardens surrounding it at that time.

4.) Portraits of Ruth Baird (Robertson) Larabee

- a. The photo on the right is from Vassar College, where Ruth majored in Latin. Both her parents were graduates of University of Michigan at the turn of the last century.

5.) Photos: (A) Charles Wright Larabee, and (B) The First Wedding in the Walled Garden

- a. Soon after Charles Larabee received the majority of his substantial inheritance in 1936, he resumed an earlier hobby of photography, and continued until he moved here in 1943. He developed all his own black and white photos, as can be seen in the image in the upper left.
- b. While traveling the American Southwest for his photography, Larabee became a self-styled expert on the traditions and lore of the fading American cowboy culture, and can be seen here in a 1941 promotional photo for lectures he gave.
- c. Far right: Because of his photographic skills, Larabee was invited on a two-month boating trip down the Colorado and Green Rivers, at a time when this was still a pioneering expedition. Here he is seen with others on the trip, in front of one of their wooden boats. They paddled the boats most of the way, occasionally using motors.
- d. Included in the trip was former U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater, Jr., also along as a photographer. They sent their camera film and other notices to people and reporters back on land by utilizing carrier pigeons.

- e. The lower photos show the first wedding held in the Walled Garden. This was the wedding of one of Ruth Larabees Senior Girl Scouts, who married immediately after high school graduation. Note the white wall in the background, for orientation. Today the Walled Garden is an extremely popular venue for weddings and functions of all types.

6.) Enclosed Glass Display Case

(Note: The light in the inside top of the case is on a timer.)

- a. Top shelf: “An Act of Generosity:
Ruth Larabee gave this Japanese doll and the antique doll’s chair on the bottom shelf to her neighbor, Jean Schneider in 1952, to celebrate the arrival of Jean’s daughter, Esther. Born Hamako Amano, Jean married Harry Schneider, a veteran of the U.S. Military Intelligence Service, In Tokyo, shortly after WWII. When she moved to this neighborhood in 1950, Jean was the first Asian “war bride” in the area. Jean donated the doll to the Larabee Museum in 2016, in recognition of the warm welcome she received from Ruth and all her neighbors.
- b. Second shelf: “Charles Larabee’s Stetson Hat”
Larabee wore this Stetson hat in the early 1940s during his speaking engagements about cowboys and the American Southwest. Throughout his travels, he became a self-styled expert on the rapidly fading cowboy culture of the Old West and captured many iconic aspects of ranch life in his black and white photographs.
- c. Third shelf: “Adventure on the Colorado River”
In 1940, Charles Larabee participated as a photographer in a thrilling, 1,400 mile boating adventure on the Green and Colorado Rivers in Utah. This book, published in 1970 and entitled “Delightful Journey,” was written and autographed by Senator Barry M. Goldwater, Jr., to document the two-month journey. Goldwater himself was an accomplished photographer. Charles Larabee is standing second from the right in the front row.
- d. Bottom shelf: “Scouting Manuals and Doll’s Chair”
Ruth and Charles Larabee would have referred to manuals like these when they supervised Camp Fire Girls and Explorer Scouts. The well-worn antique doll’s chair was

also a gift in 1952 from Ruth Larabee to her neighbor Jean Schneider to congratulate her on the birth of her daughter. Jean donated it to the Larabee Museum in 2016.

7.) Charles Larabee Photographs

These five photographs are copies of the originals captured and printed by Charles Wright Larabee during his "photography phase" from about 1936 to 1943. We have 26 of his photos in our collection.

The original black and white photos are typically 11" x 17". These demonstrate his ability to capture scenes from Latin and Central America, Mexico, American cowboys, and river trips in the American Southwest. Some of his photos were featured in the World's Fair in New York City the 1930s. He had a particular talent for framing the subject matter of his photos in a distinctive fashion.