

## Welcome to the Larabee House Museum at San Diego Botanic Garden

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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 contributions were (1) to develop this property, (2) to share it with various youth scouting groups, and then (3) to donate it to the County.

### 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.
- 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 California Mission 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 2018, 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 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, California.

## 3.) Bookcases

- a. These items are intended to represent what the Larabees 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, Ruth with her Kansas City friends, and the Baird family home. Also see Charles Larabee's ancestors and his Rotary Club photo.
- 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.

### 3a.) Letter with famous quote from Ruth Larabee

Ruth wrote this letter in August, 1960, when she worked as a registered nurse in Puebla, Mexico. It was sent to Dr. George Lindsay, Director of the San Diego Natural History Museum, whom she had befriended. (In fact, Ruth offered her property to the Nat in 1954, but for various reasons they were unable to accept it. She later purchased and gave them an entirely separate parcel of 19 acres on what is now Encinitas Blvd.) At the time she wrote this, she was noticeably "homesick" for her gardening days, and wrote, *"The greatest satisfaction in my disordered life has come from my contact with Nature."*

### 4.) Portraits of Ruth Baird (Robertson) Larabee

- a. The large portrait on the far left, c1953, (taken from the picture across the room after the camping trip) shows Ruth Larabee as she most often looked, wearing overalls, and with her hair fastened back in a snood.
- b. Tri-photo, left: Ruth's graduation picture from Vassar College, where Ruth majored in Latin. Both her parents were graduates of University of Michigan at the turn of the last century.
- c. Tri-photo, center: Ruth Larabee pictured c19?? after completing her training as an RN in Puebla, Mexico, in 1961. She continued nursing for about five years.
- d. Tri-photo, right: At a family gathering in Michigan, 1962. By this time, Ruth was considered somewhat exotic; she was deeply tanned and wore bright clothing and jewelry more typical of Mexico and the Southwest.

### 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 when he was on a speakers' circuit 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.



## Historical Timeline

Important people and events in the history of San Diego Botanic Garden

### Before the Larabees

- 1917 Donald Carlton Ingersoll purchases 45 acres in Encinitas.
- 1918 Ingersoll builds a small ranch home on one of the parcels, which is 16.5 acres. His wife Gertrude (“Nanette” or “Nan,”) plants some eucalyptus trees.
- 1923 Avocado farmer and landholder Anton van Amersfoort purchases the 16.5 acres in a foreclosure sale. He plants numerous trees, including a grove of avocados. The road now called Quail Gardens Drive is named Amersfoort Drive.
- 1923 Herman Seidler purchases the 10 acre parcel south of the van Amersfoort property from the Union Trust Company of San Diego.

### The Larabee Era

- 1926 Ruth graduates from Vassar College and marries Charles Larabee. They live in Kansas City, where she is a public school teacher, and he is an engineer for Larabee Flour.
- 1931 Charles receives the first half of his inheritance from Frederick Larabee’s estate. He quits working for Larabee Flour and co-owns “The Plant Shop,” a nursery in Kansas City.
- 1936 Charles Larabee receives the second half of his inheritance.
- 1938-42 Charles travels extensively, photographs people and landmarks in South America, Mexico, and the American Southwest. He participates in an historic two-month journey down the Colorado River and becomes a self-styled expert and lecturer on the American Southwest.
- 1942 Ruth Larabee purchases the 10 acre parcel from Herman Seidler.
- 1943 Ruth also purchases the 16.5 acre parcel from Anton van Amersfoort, combining the two properties into a ranch of 26.5 acres. The Larabees move to the ranch from Kansas City. They name the estate “El Rancho San Ysidro de las Flores” and begin planting trees, shrubs and succulents. They are helped by professionals Clifford Tanner, Christen Westergaard, and Mildred Macpherson. Ruth is Troop Leader for Senior Girl Scouts, and Charles is Scout Executive for Senior Explorer Scouts sponsored by the Encinitas Rotary Club.
- 1944 Ruth Larabee receives her inheritance from Charles Baird’s estate.
- 1946-51 The Lawn House is used as the Scout Hut for Girl Scouts, Explorer Scouts, and Camp Fire Girls.

- 1949 Charles Larabee establishes a business as a river guide for tours in Utah, Arizona and Colorado. He separates from Ruth.
- 1950 Ruth and Charles Larabee are divorced. Ruth lives alone on the ranch, and Charles moves to Balboa Island in Newport Beach, California.
- 1951 Ruth donates 4.2 acres in the southern part of the property to be used by the Boy Scouts. A new "Scout Hut" is built with fund-raising and construction organized by the Encinitas Rotary. Charles Larabee marries Lila Pihlblad Hopkins. Ruth becomes the camping sponsor of the Wananka Camp Fire Girls, headed by Mary Carol Isaacs.
- 1954 Charles and Lila Larabee move to Shadow Mountain in Palm Desert. Charles continues to participate in and assist the Encinitas Rotary Club.
- 1955 Ruth offers her 26.5 acres to the San Diego Natural History Museum, but the deal doesn't go through.
- 1957 Ruth Larabee deeds her property to San Diego County. She leaves for Puebla, Mexico and provides nursing care to needy people at the Baptist mission Hospital Latino-Americana.
- 1963 Ruth leaves Puebla, Mexico and travels in Europe.
- 1964 Ruth lives in Lubbock, Texas, and develops a relationship with Texas Tech University.
- 1968 Charles Larabee dies from lung cancer while living in Palm Desert. Ruth returns to Kansas City.
- 1969 Ruth Larabee dies in a hotel fire in England. In her will and trust she leaves an endowment for the Camp Fire Girls and money to assist nursing students in Mexico. She bequeaths Texas land and funds to purchase a carillon to Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She makes monetary gifts to 70 different friends and family members, and gives money to Tuskegee University in Alabama for scholarships for African American women.

### **After the Larabees Leave the Ranch**

- 1958-60 The County makes room additions to the Larabee House.
- 1959 The Quail Gardens Foundation By-Laws are adopted July 15.
- 1960 Gerald Cullison, the Assistant Superintendent of Park Operation and Maintenance for San Diego County, moves with his family into the Larabee House and lives there for two years.
- 1961 The Quail Gardens Foundation, Inc., is created on March 6.
- 1962 P.J. (Pious John) Miller works at the Garden for San Diego County. He and his wife Chris live in the Lawn House until 1964. After the Larabee House porch is enclosed as an office in 1964, he and his wife move to the Larabee House and live there until his retirement in 1978.
- 1966 Roads, a parking lot, water lines, bathrooms, and the entrance to the Gardens are

- installed.
- 1968 The name of the street on the east side of the Garden is changed from Amersfoort Drive to Quail Gardens Drive.
- 1970 On March 8, Quail Park Botanic Gardens is opened to the public. President of the Foundation Julia von Preissig presides over the event.
- 1971 Paul Ecke, Sr. donates 4.2 acres and the “Scout Hut” to the County for the Garden.
- 1973 The Subtropical Fruit Garden is planted by professionals Nelson Westree, Clifford Tanner, and Mildred Macpherson, along with Garden Supervisor P.J. Miller.
- 1974 The Scout Hut is remodeled and named the “Ecke Family Building.”
- 1979 The Mildred Macpherson Waterfall opens on March 11, designed and built by Dennis Torzeski and Richard LaFontaine of Torzeski Studios.
- 1980 The name is changed from “Quail Park Botanic Gardens” to “Quail Botanical Gardens.” Gardener Gil Voss is promoted to Horticulturist in and lives with his wife, Alison, in the Larabee House until 1988.
- 1981 The Docent Society is established by Alison Voss to recruit and train volunteers.
- 1985 A land swap agreement is made in which property along Saxony Road is traded in exchange for property adjacent to the nursery, with three houses.
- 1986 The Visitor Center and Gift Shop open on March 8 and the lower section of the Waterfall stream and pond is completed in the fall.
- 1992 Both the Overlook Tower and the Gazebo in the Lawn Garden are built.
- 1993 San Diego County tax-funded support operations cease. San Diego County retains title to the land and leases the property to the non-profit Quail Gardens Foundation, Inc., for five years for a nominal amount.
- 1995 Julian Duval is hired as the first Executive Director (later President and CEO) of the Gardens. The Canary Islands exhibit is installed.
- 1996 The Bamboo Garden opens. The evening holiday event called Garden of Lights begins.
- 1997 The Subtropical Fruit Garden is renovated.
- 1998 The Waterfall area is upgraded and called the Tropical Rain Forest.
- 2000 The Native Plants and Native People display is dedicated to interpret the lifestyle of the Kumeyaay indigenous people who lived in this area. A ramada, an ewaa dwelling, pond, and a stream are constructed. The first Gala fund-raising event is held.
- 2003 The Seeds of Wonder Children’s Garden opens. The City of Encinitas leases the Garden 4.5 acres to the north. The San Dieguito Heritage Museum occupies 1.2 acres.
- 2004-09 Many of the gardens are renovated with new plantings, and several new gardens are added: The Undersea Succulent Garden, the Mexican Garden, and the South African Garden.



- 2009      The Hamilton Children's Garden opens, the largest children's garden on the West Coast. The Garden changes its name to "San Diego Botanic Garden."
- 2012      The Native Plants and Native People Trail is renovated, the Welcome Center admissions building opens, and the Gift Shop (now called The Garden Shops) is renovated.

### **Name Changes**

1970: Quail Park Botanic Gardens

1980: Quail Botanical Gardens

2009: San Diego Botanic Garden

*Note: This Historical Timeline was created for the book entitled Sowing Seeds of Wonder, by Sally Sandler, Docent and Garden Historian, 2016.*

## Larabee House Set-up Instructions for Museum Guides

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1. Find the three large outdoor promotional signs (from the Tour Guides' closet in hallway.) Place one at the bottom of the steps leading into the Larabee House, one outside the Larabee House by the road, and the third at the Admissions Booth.
2. Remove any litter visible on shelves or around the living room.
3. Straighten books on the shelves if they have been moved.
4. Set up small round table (from the Tour Guides' closet in hallway) and a chair somewhere comfortable in the room.
5. Cover the table with green table cloth (found in cupboard to right of fireplace.)
6. Place copy of the "Sowing Seeds of Wonder" book on the table (found in cupboard to right of fireplace.) This copy is to remain here.
7. Also find these tour guide instructions, (in cupboard to right of fireplace.)
8. Set up the easel and wood and glass framed dual portrait (from Tour Guides' closet in hallway) inside the room, maybe nearest the east door.
9. Turn on all light switches (the rows of spot lights, and the lights cluster/chandelier in the center. (Fan only if necessary.)
10. Open window shades facing the Walled Garden to about half way.
11. Following the time period, return all the items listed above to their proper locations.