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# New Acquisitions from St. James-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church

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## New Acquisitions from St. James-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church

Archivist Notes

by Michael Mishler

*"A light earthquake shock at 3 o'clock this morning and another just before noon. It has been rather cloudy today. . . This page ends the book - Tomorrow I mean to start a new book and start writing 1900 for the first time."*

- Anson Mills



Anson Peaslee Mills, retired lawyer, husband of real estate broker and community booster Nellie Mills. His contribution to La Jolla was the series of diaries he wrote, sometimes irregularly, from 1895 until his death in 1932.

With these words, put down in his sometimes-cryptic handwriting, Anson Mills ended his diary for 1899. That diary is on display as part of the Society's exhibit *Home of Your Dreams: Early La Jolla, 1887 through the 1920's*.

Mr. Mills kept a diary for almost all his years in La Jolla detailing not just his family's activities but also the big, and small, events during the early years of La Jolla's history. Those early years are, in some ways, the most interesting because other than the natural beauty of the coastline there was little reason to visit, let alone live in La Jolla. The land was dry, scrubby, far from civilization and had little to offer for someone seeking to make a living. Things changed in 1887 when Francis Botsford laid out the streets and staked out the 25' x140' lots of the little community of La Jolla Park. With the coming of the a rail line in the 1890's, La Jolla became an easy day trip from San Diego

and more and more, those who came to visit decided to stay. In 1900, three hundred-fifty pioneers had made La Jolla their home. People such as, Anna Held, creator of the Green Dragon Colony, and George Webster Heald who built the first house in La Jolla. By the middle of the 1920's the population had grown to 5,000 people and La Jolla was known as much for its cultural and social life as it was for its natural beauty.

The exhibit, scheduled to run through March, 2013, is drawn from the images and stories found in Historian Carol Olten and former Society Archivist Heather Kuhn's 2008 book, *Images of America: La Jolla*, as well as artifacts from the Society's archives. For anyone hoping to learn about the early days of La Jolla this exhibit is a must see.



Built in 1887 the Heald house is believed to have been the first house built in La Jolla. Mr. Heald, pushing the lawn mower in this picture, actually built his barn first, then the house.

Michael Mishler is the Society's Archivist & Curator

New Acquisitions from St. James-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church

by Molly McClain



Ellen Browning Scripps attends ceremony at St. James-by-the-Sea Episcopal church in the early 1900s

LJHS recently acquired materials – deeds, agreements, and blueprints – that document the early history of La Jolla's Episcopal church, St. James-by-the-Sea. They reveal the concern of the Scripps half-sisters, Ellen and Virginia, to maintain a visually appealing complex of buildings across the street from their estate, South Moulton Villa.

Ellen Browning Scripps and her half-sister, Virginia, first moved to La Jolla in 1897 after the former purchased two lots on Prospect Street and built a

private residence. In 1903, Ellen bought the remaining properties on her block as well as lots in Block 36, the future site of St. James-by-the-Sea.

At first, many La Jolla churchgoers shared a single building on Girard Avenue, known as the Union Church. Episcopal services were held in the morning while Congregational-Presbyterian ones were held in the afternoon. In 1906, the Episcopalians split from the Union Church and met in the Wisteria Cottage, owned by Virginia Scripps. Ellen called this "Jenny's church" (her sister's nickname) and noted that the congregation often numbered as many as fifty people.

In 1907, Ellen and Virginia provided the land and money for the construction of the Mission Church of St. James-by-the-Sea, designed by Irving and Louis Gill. Dedicated on March 8, 1908, it was "crowded far beyond capacity" with La Jollans keen to view the Mission Revival structure

and participate in the service. Virginia donated two immense clam shells from the South Sea Islands, their edges rimmed with silver, for use as a baptismal font.

According to one resident, Virginia considered St. James to be "her own private church just the way the old families in France and England used to have their private chapels." She bossed around the resident clergyman, sometimes rebuking him right in the middle of the service. "If he said some thing she disagreed with or talked too long, she was known on one occasion to stand up and say, 'You'd better stop talking now, don't you see everybody is going to sleep?'"

Ellen, on the other hand, rarely attended church. She wrote that listening to a symphony orchestra "was better than a year's Sunday sermons." However, her close friendship with the Right Reverend Joseph H. Johnson, bishop of the Los Angeles Diocese of the Episcopal Church, ensured her support of both St. James-by-the-Sea and The Bishop's School.

Documents in the LJHS collection show the land transactions that took place between 1903 and 1931. Ellen conveyed property to the church on the condition that lots 1 and 2—located directly opposite her house—be used as a park "and that no structure of any kind be erected thereon." Virginia, meanwhile, acquired lots 4 and 5 from Louise and Fred Stephens and transferred them to the church in 1907 and 1911, respectively.

Photographs also reveal the changes that took place between 1907 and 1931. The Mission Church of St. James-by-the-Sea lasted no more than two decades before being moved to Draper and Genter Streets where it stands today. Photos show the church, still draped with ivy, being hauled across town on a flatbed truck in 1929. The collection also contains architect Louis J. Gill's blueprint for the modern St. James-by-the-Sea, dated March 8, 1930. The new church, including a rectory and parish house, occupied most of the entire block and, in deference to the wishes of the Scripps sisters, included a garden planted with drought-resistant shrubs and trees.

These documents remain preserved for posterity courtesy of the Rector and Wardens of St. James-by-the-Sea.

Molly McClain is a professor at the University of San Diego and is writing a new biography on Ellen Browning Scripps.