



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. He 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. 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.
- 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.
- 2019 The Dickinson Family Education Conservatory Opens. This state-of-the-art, 8,000 sq. ft glass-enclosed facility, along with an outdoor 3,512 sq ft. amphitheater, is one of the most significant additions to the Garden in its history, both in terms of creating a unique educational public space and in developing our overall plant collection for our visitors to enjoy.

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 Historian, 2016.