

# San Clemente Historical Society

*"Forward the Dream"*

NEWSLETTER OF THE SAN CLEMENTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AUGUST- OCTOBER 2010

## OLE'S BLUEPRINT STILL INSPIRES

By Raad Ghantous,  
Preservation Chair  
San Clemente Historical Society

I wonder how many people simply just drive right by the circa 1950's San Clemente Chamber of Commerce building on El Camino Real and don't even realize that just beyond it lies a place that truly characterizes the history of our beloved San Clemente, the Spanish Village. A place that even predates a built up Avenida Del Mar and that has been a center for our community ever since it was envisioned back in 1927 by Ole Hanson himself.

That year, Ole Hanson the father of San Clemente, "determined to paint a clean picture", deliberately gave birth to Plaza Park, a classically designed community gathering place in the round (or in this case in the oval); with grand wide streets dramatically leading to and encircling it. He intended for Plaza Park to be an integral and important amenity for San Clementeans for he located the first school, Las Palmas, and the first church in the Spanish Village, Saint Clements, near it. This was to be a gathering place for the growing community in the spirit of the historic village centers of old Spain.

For Ole, San Clemente was a destination and a lifestyle. He envisioned a family friendly village atmosphere, with a splash of glamour that became more and more a reality every day as the movie stars of the '20s and '30s frequented it for weekends or longer escaping the growing sprawl of Los Angeles.

On September 2nd, 1927 the El Heraldo de San Clemente, the local newspaper, read: "contract for four tiled fountains, brooks and a pool for Oriental birds in the plaza has been let to Strang Bros. Twelve-foot octagonal tiled fountains are to occupy the four corners of the pool, which will be in continuous flow, spilling water through four rock-ribbed brooks to the main bird pool. Hedges and cement benches will border the main pool. Forty-four lamp standards will give a lighted path encircling the entire plaza".

The original Plaza Park that Ole envisioned started out having a pond filled with water lilies and gold fish with large working fountains at each end and red tile sidewalks throughout. At some later date the pond became a reflection pool with swans.

Many of the trees that currently adorn the streets of our Spanish Village and the municipal golf course also can trace back their roots to Plaza Park for they were grown from seeds there.

This park that was fashioned in the style of the plazas of old Spain was also the starting point of the Fiesta de la Cristianita as far



Plaza Park and the City's first school (Las Palmas) circa 1928.

back as 1954. This once important celebration commemorating the first baptism in California on the outskirts of what is now San Clemente, would commence at the park and make its way in a morning parade along El Camino Real, down Avenida Del Mar and end at the community clubhouse (the site now known as the Community Center).

Today other important signature events call Plaza Park home. The Cinco de Mayo festival is such an event which each year is filled with live music, cultural performances that feature bands and dancers, vendor booths, children's games, a popular student art show and plenty of food!

But Plaza Park these days has another name. Its moniker acknowledges the service and commitment of one of San Clemente's own living legends Max Berg. The Park was named after him in 1985.

In 1992 this, the City's oldest park received \$750,000 in renovations. New playground equipment, a lighted, paved plaza and a stage for community events now stands in the center of the park where the reflection pool once stood. Funds for the project were collected from developer's fees and state grants

And that brings us to today and the latest renovation proposed by the City and discussed by the community. The total cost of this project interestingly also amounts to \$750,000 and will be funded mostly by a grants from the State-Legislated Safe Routes to School in the amount of \$594,000 with the remainder coming from the City.

The initial proposal presented received a lot of resistance from the community both

living right adjacent to the park as well as in other parts of town. The push back was due to the proposed shape change from the historical oval, the carving out, thus demolition of part of the original park footprint perimeter to allow diagonal back-in parking across from Las Palmas school, the inappropriate installation of new sidewalks, and the narrowing of the grand approach to and around the park in a manner that would further make it more difficult in the future to identify the original historical park and differentiate it from the new additions.

This reaction from the citizens of San Clemente sent the project back to redesign and review by the City. However, the interesting thing here is that the intention behind these latest renovations were in fact at one point existing in the original park designed and built by Ole Hanson himself! The tiled sidewalks being discussed were already in place when Plaza Park originally opened as was ample lighting that both provided for safety and enjoyment of the park in the evenings.

Sometimes in the attempt to improve things it seems the City of San Clemente would be well advised to review and thoroughly familiarize themselves with the blueprint that City founder Ole Hanson so generously gifted us all with.

In the case of Plaza Park, later Max Berg Park, the City officials and staff would be well served to seek Ole's original vision as they set out to revise this latest list of improvements.

Ole's vision for Plaza Park was for a gathering place in the style of the Plazas of old

### DATES TO REMEMBER

October 3rd, 3pm

Annual Membership Meeting  
Candidates Forum  
Community Center Auditorium

New Year's Eve Gala  
December 31st  
at the Historic Casino

### The New Historic San Clemente Book is Here!

*"Images of America: San Clemente"*

by: Jennifer Gare:

A collaboration between Garey and the San Clemente Historical Society, this book tells the story of the town via 190 captioned photographs from the society's archives.



Spain with dramatic grand approaches leading to it.

In its latest attempt to provide added safety to the park the City should encourage and seek creative solutions that accomplish their stated goals but not at the smallest expense of the historical integrity of this iconic site. The proposed project plans should receive the full diligence and be processed through all the oversight committees and agencies that normally would review and approve any modifications to other properties listed on the City's own historical resource list of which Max Berg park is definitely one.

This was never intended or envisioned to be a simple neighborhood park at the end of a cul-de-sac. This the first park, and only planned Plaza in San Clemente, the Spanish Village, was and should continue to be regarded as an iconic place for the community as a whole for many more generations and years to come.

Ole's Blueprint still inspires....seek its wisdom.☺