

EXHIBIT REVIEW

Remember the childhood riddle “What is Black and White and Red [Read] all over?” Well, forget the old answer and come visit “Sin Diego: The Stingaree’s Transformation from Vice to Nice,” San Diego History Center’s newest exhibit at their Balboa Park museum. Here is an opportunity, at your discretion, to explore San Diego’s sordid and scandalous past, and its modern day rescue, the Gaslamp Quarter Historic District.

“Sin Diego” honestly and graphically offers up the conflicts and tensions created by this “new” town: The multilayering of society, its laws, its people and its attempts to solve social and economic challenges. The introductory quote by Senator James Mills, author and former Curator of the Serra Museum, sets the tone of legitimacy for this presentation of the seamy side of our past.

Walking into the “Sin Diego” gallery you are assailed by vibrant red walls, red fabric floor to ceiling panels and giant black and white photo murals bringing us the Stingaree--San Diego’s red light history. Take your time: No streets to cross, no noisy traffic, no sidewalk cafés or hucksters, just the air-conditioned quiet.

Wandering through these 800 square feet of exhibit space presents the visitor with choices depending on how deep one wishes to examine the subjects and objects displayed. One will notice that the size and color of the information panels are themed. Perhaps a key could be offered to assist the visitor in deciphering these themes. For example, the pink panels are set lowest on the walls specifically for children, although it was suggested that the print font may too small for them to read comfortably. An accompanying workbook for school programs will be available. [Children, preferably with adult guidance, may view this exhibit]. In reviewing the various panels, the font size also created an extended effort to read all that was written. Another concern is the wall with the Chinese story seems to lack focus plus an awkward placement of the exhibit case.

As one strolls through the bright orange half walls, one leaps 70 years into modern Gaslamp Quarter, the revitalization of the old Stingaree. The color photos of ‘shabby not sheik’ downtown San Diego demonstrates the continuation of social and economic challenges.

Time travel! Sit on the recreated bench, a favorite place for remembering the many stories about downtown and recall all the storms of controversy. Marvel at the composite photo mural of Fifth Avenue then and now. Walk around the Horton Plaza Shopping Center model with the corresponding aerial photo showcasing developer Ernie Hahn and architect Jon Jerde’s keystone of modern redevelopment. Look at the photo plaques. Read about a few of the people who had the vision, the heart and the drive to change out skid row for a new Horton Plaza and historic

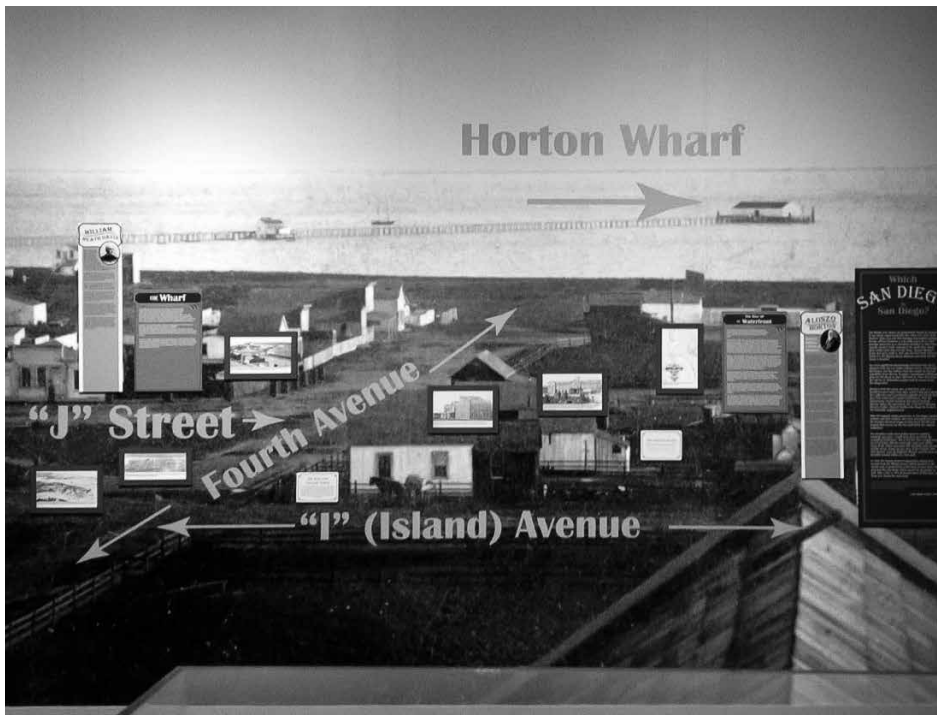
Gaslamp. So many pioneers are still here and many are now gone. Heroes and heroines all.

Exiting the Stingaree, there is an added bonus to marvel at--the “almost famous” Sun Cafe model built to scale by Lois Wittner plus information and photos of members of the Japanese community.

Linda S. Harshberger

Maybe

This presentation is particularly delightful to me because I was witness to this transformation. As children we never went South Of Broadway “SOB”, but as an adult I would bargain hunt at the Goodwill & Volunteers of America thrift stores, and wander through San Diego Hardware looking at the past. In 1979 while driving up 5th Avenue I slammed on the brakes, stopped my car in the middle of the street and stared at the Yuma Building nearly restored to it’s 1880’s glory.



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