WELCOME

Starting Anew

SAN DIEGO IS MORE THAN THE MARKETING SLOGAN OF "SUN, SAND, AND SURF." It’s a dynamo of opportunity and reinvention that goes to the heart of our community’s DNA.

This year, the Times will unveil plans for the new San Diego History Center in Balboa Park, where we commemorate the past and celebrate what makes our region unique—where we come together and connect as community.

In this issue we highlight Nathan Harrison. His story, of being born into slavery yet setting here for a new life, is a touchstone of our community’s DNA. It’s a dynamo of opportunity and reinvention that goes to the heart of our community’s DNA.

01 INSIDE SDHC
Membership news, community partnerships, and how a local historian gave back to the History Center

03 THE MOMENTS
People, places, objects, and events that made San Diego history

08 UNCOVERING HISTORY
Archaeologist Seth Mallios and SDSU students excavate Nathan Harrison’s homestead

12 I WAS THERE
Former zoo director Chuck Bieler on the Wild Animal Park’s grand opening

ON THE COVER
Top: Harrison and his cabin Bottom: Cabin dig site, 2006 AERIAL PHOTO BY SETH MALLIOS

Fashion Redux

What’s old is new again at Mesa College

Since 2012, Mesa College fashion students have been reimagining pieces from the San Diego History Center’s clothing collection. This year’s class pulled inspiration from the decade of leisure suits and disco decadence, the ‘70s. Here, assistant professor of fashion Jordyn Smiley and students Arantxa Akerlundh, Susan Peterson, and Marine Weiss shed some light on the process.

How can dated garments be reinterpreted to feel modern?

SMILEY: A designer can be inspired by the silhouette of a period garment, but reinterpret it by making it out of a modern fabric. Or they could re-create a certain specific element, such as the shape of the sleeves or the ruffles on a skirt, but change the rest. A designer could even create a completely new garment out of a fabric that is similar to the period garment. The possibilities are endless.

What about the garments inspired you?

PETERTON: What was your favorite part?

SMILEY: The colors and patterns of the ‘70s were bright and playful. The garments were not dictated by one style—there were minis, maxis, full and tailored looks.

AKERLUNDH: What first captivated me was the silhouette of the garments. The ‘70s were an important and liberating era for women, and such is present in the tall and slender yet empowering silhouette. It’s neither feminine nor masculine; it’s a perfect balance.

WEISS: I loved the idea of getting my inspiration from historical garments and trying to honor them with a 2020s vibe.

What can we learn from vintage designs?

SMILEY: Studying styles from the past gives us an insight into not just what the trends of the time were, but who people were. It helps us gain a better understanding of history in general, and repeating certain trends or styles from the past can help a designer communicate a message in today’s fashion.

Photos by Chris Travers

The CONTENTS

Bill Lawrence
President and CEO
San Diego History Center
Humans—ancestors of the Kumeyaay and other groups of California Indians—have lived in this region for at least 12,000 years, far older than the scientific consensus for habitation of the New World.

Additionally, in recent years the “kelp highway hypothesis”—regarding a coastal migration from Beringia down the coast to Central and South America—has been gaining ground as a way of explaining how people initially came to the Americas. This date, which had been considered by some in the scientific community to be too old, required some correction and explanation.

The Cerutti mastodon find in the South Bay by San Diego Natural History Museum scientists, widely publicized in a 2017 issue of the journal *Science*, suggested human butchery marks on mastodon bones dating to 130,000 years ago, far older than the scientific consensus for habitation of the New World. However, these Late Pleistocene dates have since been discredited by the archaeological community.

On page 10 of the fall 2019 issue of the Times, a timeline date of 75,000 BCE read, “Human presence in the San Diego region stretches back to at least the Late Pleistocene, and possibly far longer by earlier hominids.” This date requires some correction and explanation.

The question of when the peopling of the Americas occurred has long been the subject of intense debate and scrutiny, both in popular media and within the scientific community. Dates of initial habitation are continuously being revisited and shift as new evidence comes to light. For example, from the 1950s to the 1980s archaeologists using dating methods like carbon-14 and amino acid racemization at various sites such as Texas Street (San Diego River Valley), and at La Jolla and Torrey Pines have provided dates ranging as far back as 60,000 years ago. However, these Late Pleistocene dates have since been discredited by the archaeological community.

In all, the duo produced some 25 images perfect for Carter’s purposes. “They helped me find some different and unusual photos people will really enjoy,” she says. “The quality of the work was excellent. There were no mistakes. They did their work so professionally and capably.”

For their efforts, Carter donated $1,000 to SDHC. “In my research, I’ve found both the photo and document archives offer materials unavailable from any other source,” she says. “When I came to San Diego 30 years ago, I loved learning about local history because it’s so foundational for the United States, and the History Center is preserving and promoting an appreciation of that history.”

A historian donates $1,000 for images “unavailable from any other source”
Beneath Palomar Observatory’s iconic dome, astronomers from around the world gaze into the heavens in search of new discoveries that shape the way we see the universe. In 1928, following construction of large-scale telescopes at Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin and Mount Wilson Observatory outside Los Angeles, astronomer and Caltech co-founder George Ellery Hale won a $6 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to build an even larger one. Palomar Mountain was selected for the location due to the clarity of its night skies. Hale’s team turned to Corning Glass Works and its revolutionary new material Pyrex to construct the mirror blank. The first attempt was a failure, but in 1948 Hale’s dream was finally realized and his namesake 200-inch reflecting telescope went into operation—a decade after his death. It remained the largest optical telescope in the world until 1975, and the observatory remains an active research center today.
IN THE SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD, this shallow valley lay beyond control of any mission, earning it the handle Rincón del Diablo, The Devil’s Corner. In 1843, it was part of a land grant given to Juan Bautista Alvarado, then-governor of Las Californias. (Its Spanish name, meaning “hidden,” may refer to a secluded spring.) Nearby San Pasqual Valley was the site of one of the bloodiest encounters of the Mexican American War, and now a state historic park commemorates the lives lost on December 6, 1846 in a battle between U.S. forces (led by General Stephen Watts Kearny) and Californio forces (led by General Andrés Pico). Both generals claimed victory. Also in Escondido is Kit Carson Park, named for the famous scout associated with several key events in the United States’ westward expansion.

In 1887, the Santa Fe Railway laid tracks to Escondido, where an impressive 100-room hotel went up. The next year, the city—population 500 or so—was incorporated. By the end of the century, citrus groves, avocado trees and grapevines were producing a bountiful harvest.

In 1972, coinciding with the opening of what was then called the Wild Animal Park, the growing city began evolving into a hub of arts and culture. Today, its denizens include the California Center for the Arts, San Diego Children’s Discovery Museum, and of course, the company credited with landing the region on the craft beer map, Stone Brewing.

LEGEND HAS IT THAT IN 1880, Ella Klauber, daughter of Bohemia-born pioneering San Diego retailer Abraham Klauber, was scouring a Spanish dictionary for a way to describe her family’s 3,350-acre lot. In the Es, she spotted it: encanto, Spanish for “enchantment.” Trains began rolling through a few years later, then automobiles, bringing more and more people. Between 1911 and 1913, Encanto’s population had grown from 120 to 285 and the self-sufficient town had sprouted a few stores, a post office, a school, and a pool hall. The neighborhood was annexed to the city of San Diego in 1916.

Encanto continued to grow and become more diverse in the following decades, likely because racial covenants in South east San Diego were generally less restrictive. Its suburban farmland attracted Japanese farmers in the years before internment. After World War II, African Americans sought out more integrated areas to buy homes. In the ’90s, the Wat Lao Boubpharam Buddhist temple opened to serve the city’s Laotian community.

Business owner Don Dauphin told Susan Vaughn of the San Diego Reader in 1998: “There’s good people here. It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white, people treat you the same—nicely.” Encanto remains one of San Diego’s most diverse neighborhoods, and one of the most affordable: The Union-Tribune notes that its median home price, $425,000, is well below the average for single-family homes citywide, $573,500.
Behind Closed Doors

After decades out of sight, these remarkable doors are open to all

Carved by the artist Reginald Machell, who lived at Lomaland, they depict idealized interpretations of Tristan and Isolde, the main characters of a Celtic-Norman romantic legend. They are accompanied by a dog (symbolizing fidelity), lilies (symbolizing purity), and other decoration. “Untangling all these symbols takes time. It’s multilayered, borrowing from Eastern and Western histories,” Johnson says. “They’re almost a physical microcosm of Theosophical beliefs. They attest to the importance of art and culture and handmade things. Maybe that’s why they’re so powerful.” By studying the doors, one can better understand the people who transformed the land above Sunset Cliffs. The community’s leader, Katherine Tingley, bought the land in 1897 and erected buildings topped with jewel-toned glass domes and other structures. Residents planted the many trees that lent the neighborhood its nickname “Wooded Area.” They were among the first in the county to cultivate avocados. They even had a radio station. “It was the cultural center of San Diego at the time,” Johnson says. “There were many firsts.”

STATS
WEIGHT 500 lbs (each)
HEIGHT 12 feet

San Diego Becomes a Boom Town

A rate war between the railroads led to a population boom and land stampede. The CALIFORNIA SOUTHERN RAILROAD opened the first Santa Fe Depot downtown, a small Victorian building.

JOHN D. SPRECKELS visited San Diego on his yacht Lurline and began investing in the city. He would move here permanently after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

The Electric Rapid Transit Company introduced the FIRST ELECTRIC STREET RAILWAY SYSTEM in the western US, running from D Street downtown (now Broadway) to Old Town.

Harr Wagner relocates his literary magazine GOLDEN ERA from San Francisco, convinced that San Diego would replace it as the new cultural center of the West.

YES, the opening on a key found on the doors is in the shape of a swastika. However, when it was carved around the turn of the 20th century, it had nothing to do with Nazism. “The swastika is an ancient symbol of blessing and good fortune,” Johnson says, borrowed from Indian/Hindu tradition and associated with numerous cultures from across Asia and Europe.

What about the San Diego History Center attracted you?

While working at the Red Cross, I became very familiar with the uniqueness of San Diego. I find the combination of communities fascinating and look forward to bringing them together to celebrate one another and share our commonalities and differences. I’m also hopeful that my background in banking will help with generating ideas to help finance new programs and projects.

What have you observed about the museums’ current programs?

Before I accepted the position, I had only visited the History Center once many years ago and I had never visited the Serra Museum. The latter’s recent renovation was impressive, the oral histories and the videos as you enter are quite inspiring and informative. They do an excellent job of capturing the rich history of “where California began.”

As I walked through each gallery in the History Center, my creative energy was explosive. I couldn’t stop thinking about new ideas; I could easily visualize a “quilt of communities” coming together. And when I went downstairs to the archives, I was speechless—over 45 million documents, photos, and objects! All I could think about was How can this information get to the community?

Is the History Center entering a new phase?

It definitely is. We’re preparing for a new transformation of the museum, and I like to say that it’s also transforming faces, friends, and finances. The staff and the board are becoming more diverse to more closely reflect the community we serve—which also increases the potential for new partnerships and funding opportunities.

What are your goals for the center’s development efforts?

Engage, expand, and expose. Engage our current members, donors, supporters, and community members more than ever. Expand our partnerships, programs, funding, and memberships— I’m hoping we can reach a goal of 30,000 members. And expose the community, the country, and the world to the great experiences the museums have to offer. We’d also like to form a community advisory council to bring together various groups to discuss how to more effectively share our history.

To learn more about how you can support the History Center, you can connect with McKinney directly at wmcinkey@sandieghohistory.org.
For the past 15 years, SDSU professor Seth Mallios and his students have been painstakingly excavating the former homestead of San Diego's first African American homesteader, Nathan Harrison.

PHOTO BY SETH MALLIOS

BURIED IN THE RUBBLE of a makeshift cabin atop Palomar Mountain lie remnants of the American Dream. The bones, bullets, buttons, and bottles unearthed here are pieces of the past, relics of Nathan Harrison, San Diego's first African American homesteader and a local legend. Harrison survived slavery in the antebellum South, was brought to San Diego during the gold rush, gained his freedom when his owner died, then defied the odds by carving out a place for himself in the Wild West and the Gilded Age. The items he cherished and left behind define his legacy: an embodiment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
Timelines are one of the best tools we have for understanding history. And three’s the magic number, at least when it comes to visualizing the life and times of Nathan Harrison—and their greater context—at the History Center exhibition, opening this spring in Balboa Park.

The most zoomed-out level shows the events shaping California and the United States in his day, such as the completion of the Panama Railroad, the Civil War, the civil rights movement, and World War I. “We didn’t want to isolate Harrison from bigger, structural things. They show what he was up against but also how he had agency,” says Dr. Tina Zarpour, the center’s vice president of education. “I think seeing past exhibitions on local African American history, San Diegans came understanding.”

Harrison’s incredible story—and the tall tales it inspired—piqued the interest of San Diego State University anthropology professor Seth Mallios, and he’s been uncovering artifacts at this site for over 15 years. Leading teams of aspiring archaeologists, he treks up a winding dirt road and braves the elements to excavate Harrison’s well-preserved homestead, a few painstaking inches at a time.

“For me, archaeology is about finding the most important stories, not the earliest stories,” he says. “Even though Harrison is the first African American homesteader [in San Diego] and ‘first’ implies early, what got me excited was everything he overcame.”

Mallios and his students have found tens of thousands of artifacts, from German liqueur bottles and snake oil remedies to bronze sock garters and suspender clips from the Sears catalog. The mismatched pieces reflect that Harrison’s homestead—and the man himself—became a draw to locals and travelers alike. He’d put on raggedy clothes to play up his character, tell stories, and pose for pictures. Historians believe visitors who made the treacherous daylong trip up the mountain gifted Harrison many of the items not found in similar archaeological sites, such as suspender clips.

Mallios says it seems as if there were two entirely different phases to his life—the first 60 years when he was a rancher and a laborer, and the last 30 to 40 years when his homestead became a tourism hot spot. Harrison tailored his stories to his audience. He often played the part of the helpful pioneer: a slight, charismatic man with a bushy white beard who provided water from his natural spring to visitors (and their horses, or bone-dry radiators) who made it up the mountain.

Harrison and his students have come across artifacts that appeared to be telling themselves, ‘This can’t all be true.’ You start being skeptical of everything, and that’s where archaeology becomes really fun, because then we get to be myth busters.”

In their various digs, Mallios and his crew have come across artifacts that appeared to contradict some of the stories. “There are things, like a sharpened pencil and a pen cap,” he says. “When you find those at a site of someone who’s supposed to be illiterate, that raises questions.”

Other urban legends place Harrison at some of San Diego’s most notable events. “Harrison is really the Forrest Gump of Southern California—if there’s a famous event, there’s a story that places him there.” Around the start of the civil rights movement—more than three decades after Harrison’s death—people twisted the story to fit their preferred narrative. For example, some claimed Harrison was “allergic to labor of any kind,” while others portrayed him as empowered, scraping up whatever money he could to buy his freedom. Neither account held water.

One tall tale, if it’s ever proven, could be a doozy. There are rumors that he had a stash of gold up there,” Mallios says. He and his teams haven’t struck gold—yet. But who knows what they may find as they continue to dig for truth in tall tales?
A New Zoo Roars to Life

The innovative safari experience was a wild ride from day one

In that first week, in May 1972, the most temperamental beast wasn’t a rhinoceros or water buffalo. It was an unpredictable monorail. “We were having a lot of mechanical problems and were paranoid it would break down with all these VIPs out there,” says Chuck Bieler, now 84.

His job was to plan opening ceremonies for a groundbreaking concept, then called the Wild Animal Park. The 1,800 acres of chaparral in San Pasqual Valley were a perfect stand-in for the South African highveld. But only a third of it was developed. “There wasn’t an awful lot there,” remembers Bieler, who at the time was just a couple of years into his half-century tenure with the zoo, where he served as executive director from 1973 to 1985. “It was more of a dream of what you could do.”

Regardless, then-Mayor Pete Wilson hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony with 500 in attendance. The $10 million park was declared open when animal trainers Pat and Ted Derby led an elephant named Nina into the rotunda. A bottle of Champagne was broken on the monorail which, despite those fears, behaved. It snaked for five miles among giraffes, zebras, impalas, and other hoofed animals that roamed freely in wide-open enclosures that mimicked their native habitats. The day after the dedication, 3,000 members of the public showed up (paying an admission fee of $1.25).

The park was the vision of Mister Zoo himself, Dr. Charles Schroeder, who first saw it as a reserve where large animals could breed. The idea to make it public came later. Broadcasting live on dedication day, storied TV anchor Jack White captured the spirit of the inventive park, calling it “an experiment in preserving endangered species.”

By the late 60s, zoo culture had begun to shift. “Our conscience started to say that we had to be propagators of our species and be more involved in conservation,” recalls Bieler. The park quickly proved those efforts successful. And it was a hit with San Diegans: Zoo membership doubled after the park’s opening. “The zoo had people in San Diego believing in this program, and they rallied around it.”

Even today, the park stands alone. “Nobody has really duplicated it anywhere else,” says Bieler. (And for the next 32 years, before it was replaced with an open-air shuttle, the monorail chugged on.)
HISTORY BEGINS WITH YOUR SUPPORT

The generosity of our community enables us to connect people with our shared past through preserving, educating, and promoting the rich stories of the San Diego region.

Here are some ways to help the San Diego History Center fulfill this mission:

- BECOME A MEMBER
  - enhance and preserve the San Diego History Center and Junípero Serra Museum

- VOLUNTEER WITH US
  - present award-winning exhibitions and public programs that engage visitors of all ages and share our region’s unique stories
  - provide educational resources for students including opportunities for underserved schools

- SUPPORT OUR MISSION
  - deliver public and educational programs that reach over 150,000 families, students and visitors annually
  - preserve millions of historic artifacts and archival collections for future generations to enjoy

For more information about how you can help preserve, promote, and reveal our region’s rich history, please contact Sheila Thomas at: sthomas@sandiegohistory.org or 619-232-6203 x 126

San Diego History Center, in Balboa Park

The San Diego History Center, located in the heart of Balboa Park, offers a grand atrium, theater, conference room, and nine galleries. The beautiful and spacious venue is ideal for weddings, cocktail receptions, social hours, meetings, and fundraisers.

Junípero Serra Museum, in Presidio Park

The Junípero Serra Museum, located in Presidio Park, offers an iconic outdoor terrace, intimate interior gallery, and incredible views of the city skyline and sparkling coast. The historic mission-style museum is ideal for weddings, retreats, cocktail parties, and corporate events.

Make history at the San Diego History Center and the Junípero Serra Museum!

Start planning today! Please contact our event coordinator: events@sandiegohistory.org or 619-232-6203 x 126
San Diego Comic-Con party at El Cortez hotel, 1974
San Diego Comic-Con party at El Cortez hotel, 1974

HISTORIC PHOTOS
MAKE A GREAT STATEMENT
VISIT THE SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER IMAGE GALLERY TO LEARN MORE.
photostore.sandiegohistory.org