

THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS OF SAN DIEGO

ITS STORY AND ITS HISTORY

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PREFACE

THE PREFACE of a story is so often written by some one beside the author that I had hoped in this case that a proper prefacer might be found, but it seemed that all available candidates were too modest or too reticent so if any introduction is needed it will have to be attempted by the author or historian which is no doubt a much better name. For after all this is merely a setting down of facts, vital interesting and we hope enlightening, for even after seventeen years of zoo education we find that there are some people living in our midst who have not visited the zoo, who scarcely know that it is here, and who yet dare sit back and express unfavorable opinions and compare it unfavorably with other zoos about which we surmise that they know as little or less than our own.

Since this story is to be published in ZONOOZ it must be serially for it is far too long for a single issue, but we hope that it may be eventually collected into a single volume provided it seems worth the collecting.

So many questions are asked, and I have spent so much time ferreting out the interesting beginnings and putting them into words that I feel every confidence our own citizens will enjoy them as I have. Our history has been already written in a way that he who runs may read, grottoes, and gardens have grown in a few short years where uncontrolled water courses and sage brush held sway. Exotic birds and strange beasts inhabit the canyons where once our small predators hunted out the rodents and snared the wild birds. Cultivated shrubs, lawns and trees partly replace and partly share the hillsides with our wild shrubs and wild flowers. We have tried to keep natural beauty and combine it with the art of man and the needs of science.

This writing has been prompted largely by a personal interest and a keen love for the work and a deep admiration for the men who have conceived it and carried it on but its beginning was prompted by the urging of Mr. A. T. Mercier, formerly a member of the Board of Directors of the Zoological Society who saw in the story of the zoo a tale that should not be lost to our future citizens as so much of our history has been. I hope that the result is what he desired and that he at any rate will approve of this effort.

CHAPTER I

One morning in September 1916 there appeared in one of the daily papers of San Diego a notice asking that every one interested in founding a Zoological Society in San Diego whose object should be the establishment of a zoo meet in the office of Dr. Harry M. Wegeforth. This it would seem therefore must be the beginning of our zoo. It is so far as written records go, but back of this notice, years and years back of it was the story of a child's interest in the wild things of his neighborhood. His interest in collecting turtles and birds and snakes. His realization of their monetary value even, if some of the stories of his childhood friends are to be believed. For even as a child he went to school with his pockets and boxes full of snakes and turtles which he sold or traded to the less enterprising kids of his acquaintance. Life on Western plains as a young man did nothing to lessen this interest in natural life and the study for the profession of medicine merely added a new phase to his interest in animal life and habits. This found expression in aviculture, in ranching experiments with fancy stock, chickens and pigeons and a keen interest in the development of new methods of caring for them.

Back of this notice but not so far back also was the daily sight of a few scattered groups of wild creatures housed in Balboa Park in a way that was of no great value to the community and certainly no benefit to the creatures themselves. For as many such groups are collected in hundreds of cities they had come from many private and public

sources entirely without the desire of public officials and totally unsolicited. Passing day by day these groups of wild creatures planted a seed in fertile ground that grew into a vision of a zoological garden where they might be comfortably, an interestingly housed.

It would be foolish to say that the present unique garden could have been completely visualized so early, but some concrete plan of development must have prompted the prosaic notice and some inner vision must have motivated those men who came together at the call. For a group of five men met as the result of the paragraph and a new project was launched.

Undaunted by the smallness of their number these men organized themselves and named themselves the Zoological Society of San Diego. They elected officers and took the first steps toward the incorporation of the society under the laws of the state of California. They stated their aims as being an incorporation for the advancement of the study of wild life; for the maintenance of a zoological exhibit; for furthering the study of animal diseases by the erection of a hospital; for the protection of wild life and the education of children along the lines of natural history. An ambitious program surely but launched by bold ambitious men, who knew the need and the value of such work. They were Dr. Fred Baker, professionally known as a specialist in the diseases of the eye, ear nose and throat; but personally known as our leading conchologist, a man of wide scientific interest and attainments, closely associated with the leading scientists of the day. Major J. C. Thompson of the Medical Corps of the United States Marines and an eminent entomologist. Frank Stephens interested in the wild life especially of our arid southwest, active in the collection of reptiles and birds and one of the most active of the supporters of the Natural History Society. Dr. Paul Wegeforth surgeon and physician and more actively interested in pathology and research work in its relation to human diseases than any other phase of zoological work. The fifth member of the band was Dr. Harry Wegeforth also a surgeon and physician but using his boundless energy in almost every type of civic work to be found in our community. His was the vision and his the inspiration for the future work and justly and wisely the others looked to him for guidance and leadership. So to him was delegated most of the responsibility and a large share of the work for according to the minutes of this first meeting he was elected First President of the Zoological Society of San Diego on October 2nd, 1916. Dr. Thompson was elected Vice-president; Dr. Paul Wegeforth Secretary; and for the Treasurer Dr. Fred Baker was selected.

The incorporation was carefully but persistently carried out, communications with all outstanding Zoological Societies furnished the basis for by-laws and the foundations of the work. So diligently did the baby organization strive that on December 11, 1916 the Articles of Incorporation were duly executed, signed and sealed by Frank Jordan, Secretary of State of California. A few members had been gained by the society and added to its roll, leading public citizens, newspaper men and educators making up the list of those eager to see the work progress. The first name added to the roll of five would be interesting, but the records do not furnish it so it might be unfair to officially name the person from memory for many times such records are faulty. At any rate the first annual meeting held in 1917 finds a list of members and exofficio members of forty-one listed as entitled to exercise rights of members in the society. Of that number fifteen remain on the active membership today, a few have passed away, others have left this community and a very small remainder have through lack of interest or stress of circumstances dropped their membership. Before actual steps could be taken to establish the zoo in a permanent location legally set aside for a zoological garden under the control of the society the way

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which had been threatening to enmesh this country began in earnest for us. In that year of anxiety, martial activity and strained relations affairs of merely local importance had to give way to national activity. It would have been nothing strange if so young a brain child as our zoological society had perished in its infancy. It assuredly would have so perished if it had not been founded upon such an earnest desire to accomplish a concrete fact, such deep inspiration for its fulfillment and such untiring energy as these men possessed. Noone could say to this group that now, when the world was at war was no time to be interested in zoological exhibits and the founding of a garden. And from that time to this there has never been a time when the zoological garden has not had the concentrated interest and energy of this society behind it just as strongly as at its birth.

The Zoological Society officially offered to take over the care of the groups of bears and other wild creatures then housed in Balboa Park. This offer was accepted, probably gratefully accepted by the Board of Park Commissioners. Frank Stephens offered his services as active Director of the zoo which was also accepted, gratefully no doubt. The important fact remains that with this assumption of responsibility on the part of the society and with this active work by one of its members the Zoological Society began to function and to carry out its primary aim, the establishment of a zoological exhibit. The first financial statement that can be found is a report of the treasurer that during the month of February 1917 the sum of \$95.77 had been expended in the care of the animals then on the Isthmus and actual property of D. C. Collier.

During this second year the war came nearer and nearer to the individuals and in the second year of its duration the need for medical service drew the president of the new corporation into the service of his country. Dr. Paul Wegeforth had already responded and Dr. Harry resigning from his official position followed. And so for the space of a few months, Mr. Joseph Sefton became president of the Zoological Society. Mr. Sefton is the only man who has shared this honor and the responsibility of it with Dr. Harry. For upon his return to San Diego Mr. Sefton gladly relinquished the reins to his predecessor and only successor.

(To be Continued)

THE ZOO AND OUR CHILDREN

(Continued from page 1)

tion to the natural surroundings, we have tried, by having small family types of groups, to make as large a variety with as small number of specimens as possible, still keeping no animal alone. We have concentrated upon first producing good representatives of all the great divisions of the animal kingdom and then selecting certain popular and interesting genera and making as complete a collection as possible of such as do best here in this climate. We have also tried to select such species as have not been successfully kept in other collections for those are the things least known and most interesting.

In order that the collection may be as intelligible as possible, we have placed upon each cage the name by which the specimen is commonly called, the scientific name and its natural habitat. Signs in the zoo are one of the greatest expenses; first because our out of door cages make them subject to the climatic conditions and our constant moist air with its trace of salt, is very hard on paint and signs. Second because ours is a constantly changing and growing collection; third because the animals themselves are hard on signs and lastly because people seem greatly to covet signs and we lose hundreds of them every year. Just at present, one of our men who lives on the grounds, is using his evenings without charge, to replace all of our signs and to paint many of the most needed new ones. Thus children who come into the grounds alone can find much valuable information ready at hand even although they do not have some one with them who knows the exhibit.

Now as to the uses to which the zoo can be put. Until this year, we have had a boy who is working his way through college for instructor and bus driver who was available for all of the classes that come into the zoo, but during the past year, our finances have not permitted us to pay him a salary and it is therefore impossible for him to be available except by appointment. He is driving the bus on a commission this year and will be available for taking parties around the zoo for a small fee, which can be paid to him directly. The admission to the zoo will always be free to such groups. They may come with no previous arrangements unless the use of the bus or a guide is desired. There are, however, a few of the rules which have had to be made for the protection of

the Zoological Garden and the Society which is responsible for its upkeep and development. They are first that no group is permitted in the Garden unless accompanied by a responsible adult who can have some control over the actions of the youngsters, for groups and gangs will do many things which an individual child will not. The groups should be not more than twenty for each guide or instructor. The children must be kept together both for the best advantage of themselves and the zoo. Facilities for picnics are provided and all of the employees of the Zoo are instructed not only to do everything in their power to assist such groups, but to protect them in every possible way.

Children must be compelled not only to obey signs posted on the cages, and fences, but also the laws of decency and kindness which can be taught here in a happy, natural way without preaching. The life history of the animals can be acquired by city children in the same way as children acquire such facts on farms and in country homes. For few city children can keep pets other than a single cat, dog, bird or creature of some rarer species. Such facts coming to children naturally in a zoological garden are shorn of any sensational or secret fascination and countless children have come to me with things which have puzzled them to be answered in a simple, straightforward way, which solves their questions forever.

The best time to bring in groups is early in the morning or early in the afternoon, for late in the day, many of the most interesting creatures are invisible and I have given the girls orders to admit no more parties after four in the afternoon, for study or drawing. There is no advantage in going in so late and we have had complaints from parents who confused our organization with others taking advantage of the materials in the Zoo for class work, because they were in the Zoo around dark. So, in order to protect our own association with parents who have children interested in wild life, we are making this ruling, which can have no exceptions.

Every group of children brought into the Zoo should be impressed with the following statement; it cannot be urged too strongly upon them. If it could be written and handed to each child that comes in the grounds, I feel that something might be gained: "The animals, birds and reptiles in this Zoological Garden have been brought here and confined for your pleasure and instruction. They have no way to get away from you and no protection but your own decency and kindness. This should be sufficient protection."

In this Garden children can learn to respect public property, to respect the rights of others than themselves and to be filled with the joy which comes from the love of wild, natural life. Minds filled with such thoughts and interested in the care of weaker creatures cannot be filled with evil and wicked things. In addition, there are the concrete advantages of learning how to care for their own pets properly, of working along lines in which they are most interested.

We have boys and girls as individuals working with some of our men here who are laying foundations for real scientific work in their later life, but we have not intended nor attempted to make scientists out of the boys and girls whom we have contacted. Our intention is to try to make nature lovers out of the children of our community. No girl or boy need be unacquainted with our zoo for it is free and open to them three hundred and sixty four days in the year. We want them to be nature lovers first because it will make happier men and women out of them and second because it will make San Diego a better and happier community for us all.

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