

THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS OF SAN DIEGO

Its Story and Its History

Belle J. Benchley

CHAPTER III

ALTHOUGH this history of the Zoological Garden should deal with actual development, a digression to furnish the outstanding details of the first Zoo circus cannot be out of place, for raising funds is and has always been the greatest task confronting the Zoological Society. And whenever the business of raising funds is mentioned, someone is sure to suggest a benefit and then Frank Spalding or "Dr. Harry" will say, "Oh yes, let's have a circus.."

Now this circus started out with much hope of success, the different service branches promised and delivered a program of interesting contests and bouts, staging an excellent gymkhana. Other features were from the artistic sense a real triumph, but when the day of the circus arrived, none of the persons responsible for the carrying on of the real work were to be found. From the sketchy details and reminiscences I have gathered, the following facts. Frank Spalding stepped into the breach and officiated as Master of Ceremony, Announcer and General Manager. Dr. Wegeforth held down the positions of ticket taker, usher, chief entertainer and "barker." After the meet was over and they began counting the costs—literally counting the costs—Mr. Spalding realized that the receipts: for all those who promised to sell tickets had ceased to function long before the circus; would fall far short of the expenses. Consequently, in his capacity as treasurer of the Society, he announced that he would pay off all obligations at approximately forty cents on the dollar, if the claims duly executed would be presented at his desk at the South-

ern Trust & Commerce Bank. Early the line of claimants began to form, each with a demand for a few dollars. Each had a slip showing he had been employed at the circus. Mr. Spalding insists that the circus had been conspicuous during the performance, for its lack of the usual circus comedy. But for days afterward, individuals with their claims continued to appear. When asked what part they had had in the circus, the answer was invariably "Oh I was a clown". So long after the funds were exhausted, clowns continued to appear. Mr. Spalding has never, so rumor says, seen anything very funny in the antics of a clown since the historic Zoo circus.

Funds necessary to begin the actual work of the Garden came entirely from private sources. Many persons gave generously in proportion to their resources and the widespread interest in the project made it, from the very beginning, something which belonged to the entire community, and proved beyond a doubt the popularity of its appeal. Little zoo history has been written in books, for it is written more permanently in the stone and steel of our cages and in

the flesh and bones of its specimens. But much of it is written in the hearts and minds of our citizens.

Leading in the public subscriptions for the upbuilding of this institution, not only in the size of her donations, but in the order of giving, must always stand the name of Ellen Browning Scripps. If she had left no other monument in our midst than the Zoological Garden, her name could never be forgotten. With her wide interest and broad vision, she early caught the dream of Doctor Wegeforth, saw something new and out of the ordinary in the way of a zoological exhibit; but she went farther with him than most did and saw what it would mean to the little children of our community now and in the future and agreed with him that this Garden, with its collection of rare animals housed in the most interesting and unique way possible, created as much as safety would permit according to their natural habitat, should be dedicated to the children of San Diego and never for one minute has the interest of the children of our community been

forgotten, neglected or jeopardized in the carrying on of the work.

In the laying out of the grounds as well as in the founding of the plans under which the Zoo would be operated, consultation was sought with experienced experts. Many such found the plans of the Zoo far too radical and differed for their approval and predicted that animals could not be kept under such conditions. But many were quick to see that the rough topography and the excellent climatic conditions here offered a rare opportunity for a habitat zoo.

The first donation of any size was the money for the fence, which was donated by Miss Scripps, etc.

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closing the grounds and making it possible to charge a small admission fee. There has always been some question as to the advisability of charging an admission fee into the Garden. It would, however, be impossible for the City of San Diego, even were the officials sympathetic with the Zoo and eager to do so, to maintain a zoological garden of which this community could be proud and which would be a real feature. With all of its pressure brought on the tourists, that Los Angeles has practiced, there is one thing alone in our own vicinity which has no competition there, that is our own Zoological Garden. Probably there is nothing in Southern California outside of its own community, which Los Angeles supports, either in its advertising or by its patronage to so great an extent as our Zoo because it has no rival there. By having an admission fee, the Zoological Garden is maintained principally by those who enjoy it most. From time to time, as at present, many elected officials are entirely out of sympathy with park institutions of a cultural nature and even with park development itself. It is to avoid the disastrous consequences of such political administrations that the admission fee into the Garden was early decided upon.

The chief function of the Zoological Society is to maintain public interest in the Zoo at all times and to prevent its being used as a political catspaw by unscrupulous politicians. Usually those who object to the small admission fee do not understand the workings of the Zoological Garden and do not realize how inadequate is the support received from public funds, nor how small a part of their tax money is devoted to park purposes. In fact, many of the real objectors are people who pay no taxes upon real estate and thus give no support to the Zoo except this small admission fee.

It was decided at this same time that the Zoo should forever, so long as it remained under the jurisdiction of the Zoological Society, be free to children of our com-

munity, thus giving them one of the finest educational opportunities that can be offered to childhood. No restriction is put upon the children except that they shall obey the laws of decency and kindness while within its confines.

Following closely upon the donation of the money for the fence, Miss Scripps gave large sums for the building of the bear grottoes, the seal pools, the lion and tiger grottoes and the magnificent flying cage. At the same time, she was one of the very few, so few in fact that they could be numbered on the fingers of one hand, to contribute to our operating expenses. She did at this time, donate to the Society, funds amounting to ten thousand dollars, for the salary of a competent director, one who should be outstanding and who should carry out the wishes of the Society and its fine ideals.

During these years of 1922 and 1923, greater strides were made in the development of the Zoological Garden than in any other two years in its history. In addition to the funds donated by Miss Scripps, other citizens were giving generously. Business men singly and in groups, raised hundreds of dollars for the building of the small mammal group, which is

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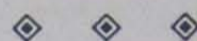
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Barless grottoes for the great cats were absolutely unheard of at the time our Zoo was started. The success of these grottoes and something of their structure will be detailed in a forthcoming chapter.

Nowhere in San Diego does the camera enthusiast find such a galaxy of varied and interesting subjects to "shoot" as here in our own Zoo.
