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LA JOLLA PEN PAL



Grounded in reality: book surveys
'Lay of the Land'
By Dave Kensler



Politics. Fraud. Discrimination. Battles. Back-room deals. War. Sounds like the making of a good mystery novel. Yet, all of it and more are part of a book titled "Lay of the Land — The History of Land Surveying in San Diego County" by Michael Pallamary.

While the title may seem a little dry, Pallamary, through 18 years of extensive research, has written an interesting book on how the county of San Diego was created through surveying and engineering.

"San Diego is one of the richest areas in the state. La Jolla is the cream of the crop. It is not that old," he explained. "Much of history is preserved in the maps. I have spent hundreds of hours going through those maps."

According to Pallamary, some of the most desirable areas of San Diego County today were not so nearly a century ago.

"A hundred years ago, Mission Beach was totally worthless because you could not grow anything there or get any water," Pallamary said. "All that the speculators deemed Coronado for was grazing cattle. It used to be a big expedition to simply go out to La Jolla because of all the canyons. Mission Beach was discarded by early surveyors as a useless sandpit."

One of the key turning points in the value of land came with the ability to bring fresh water to areas that had previously been classified unlivable.

"If you follow the patterns of development, they clustered around the San Diego River in Old Town, Mission Valley, Chula Vista and National City," Pallamary stated. "All were close to water. Then, with the marvels of modern engineering whereby water could be pumped or piped in, everything began to change."

It is also the time when, according to Pallamary, fraud and deception began to grow.

"People back east were looking for places to come to grow food and live," he said. "So people here would stick trees in the ground and hang artificial oranges on them and take photos. The people in the East receiving these photos would think the ground was rich

and fertile. Yet in reality, the land actually for sale was in places like Gilman Drive, where there were canyons going straight up and down."

Nor was the pricing of the land immune to similar deceptive practices, Pallamary said.

"The entire subdivision in the Gilman Drive area was assessed at \$197, and they were selling lots for \$100 apiece which was big money at the time," he noted.

However, it was not only water availability which impacted the growth of the county.

"The water and railroads defined our destiny," Pallamary said. "Early surveyors saw potential in San Diego as a port, but not with the land. When the railroads arrived in 1886, there were hundreds and hundreds of subdivisions laid out with people coming from all over the world."

Along with them also came more fraud and shady deals. For the people who owned land, having a railroad come through or nearby was paramount to having a financially beneficial subdivision.

"When railroad surveyors and engineers came out here, they were bribed and promised many benefits, including having a railroad line named after them," Pallamary said.

Yet through it all, La Jolla emerged as "one of the most successful subdivisions in

history," according to Pallamary. He feels much of the credit should go to the original surveyors and developers.

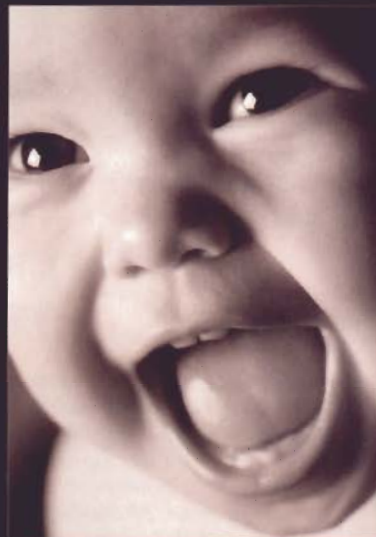
"The original map of La Jolla was mapped out in 1887," he said. "It matched the contours of the land, the curves and turns. It honors the shoreline. Back then, most surveying was just boring grids running north-south and east-west. However, the same surveyor did both Coronado and La Jolla with the winding, curving streets complementing the topography. It is no coincidence that La Jolla and Coronado are two of the most successful developments."

Pallamary hopes his book is more than simply a good read.

"The book is intended to be educational — to have an appreciation and understanding of the ground we walk on," he concluded.

"Lay of the Land — The History of Land Surveying in San Diego County" can be purchased on either barnesandnoble.com or amazon.com. Pallamary can be contacted at his company, Pallamary & Associates — Land Use Consultants, 7755 Fay Ave., Suite 1. For more information e-mail mpallamary@pipeline.com.

Photo of Mike Pallamary by Don Balch.



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