Legacy of the Ecke Ranch
Encinitas, California

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Contributions and histories of the unique people who lived near the Ecke Ranch, 1880-1960
Paul Ecke, Sr. (1898-1961) the German immigrant known as the “King of the Poinsettia” transformed a relatively unknown field plant from Mexico into a flower of commercial strength and beauty synonymous with Christmas itself. Beginning with his move to Encinitas in 1923, Ecke also spearheaded the transformation of North San Diego County from relative obscurity into the “Flower Capital of the World.” To accomplish, this he chose a portion of Southern California coastal real estate roughly 30 miles north of San Diego, which was already endowed with cooling ocean breezes and an abundance of sunshine, and added his own business ethic of hard work, innovation, and commitment. His legendary family’s story grew to include generous acts of philanthropy and civic mindedness.

The Ecke Ranch, on Saxony Road, in Encinitas, is roughly bordered by Leucadia Boulevard to the north, El Camino Real to the east, Santa Fe Drive on the south, and Vulcan Avenue to the west. The area straddles the cities of Cardiff, Leucadia, and Encinitas—all 30 miles north of downtown San Diego, and nestled against the coast of the Pacific Ocean. These communities’ geographical and historical backgrounds linked them together, and the flower field and greenhouse industry that developed extended through each.

Less well known, however, are some of the other residents of the coastal mesa where the Ecke family established their ranch: those who preceded Paul Ecke, Sr. and those who were neighbors, employees and friends. Between 1880 and 1960 a cross-cultural mix of individuals peopled this community, drawn by its dazzling climate and bound together by what the land could produce. They occupied a rare and wonderful Mediterranean eco-zone and seized the opportunity for the particular market niche it afforded. And, their unique histories merge with that of the Eckes to create a community with a legacy of generosity, pioneering spirit, and high standards of excellence for generations to come.

Earliest Settlers: Late 1800s to early 1900s

Encinitas historian Mac Hartley writes, in *Encinitas History & Heritage* (1999), “Until 1881 the coastline at Encinitas was barren, and its cliffs and valleys were considered to be uninhabitable. When California became a state in 1848, most of the coastal land was government owned and could be obtained under the Homestead Act by anyone with vision and courage.”

In 1881 the California Southern Railroad Company began constructing tracks north from National City with plans to continue along the coast to Oceanside. Nearby Cottonwood Creek provided water for the steam locomotives, and when a water tower was built, it became a scheduled whistle stop for the steam engines. The earliest Encinitas residents arrived with these important developments.
Cottonwood Creek was essential in the lives of these early pioneers. The creek emptied into the Pacific Ocean at the location of what is now Moonlight Beach in Encinitas, and a portion can still be seen in the Cottonwood Creek Park at the intersection of Encinitas Boulevard and Vulcan Avenue.

Early pioneer descendant Annie Hammond Cozens recounts in her 1947 *Brief History of Encinitas*, “Early Monday morning during the dry season [in the late 1800s] housewives could be seen carrying lunches and laundry down to the railroad well in the canyon of Cottonwood Creek. Washboards and tubs were kept down there. While the women washed the clothes, the children played on the nearby beach. The clothes were hung on the bushes to dry.”

Hartley adds, “The rigors of immigration, enduring shortages and seeking solutions produced a determined and strong community that emerged from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. The flood and brief famine of 1884 added to the tribulations of these settlers.”

**Lemuel Cornell Kincaid**

Among the first of the early settlers in Encinitas was Lemuel C. Kincaid (1853-1930)⁷, a railroad conductor and Civil War veteran who in 1882 purchased a 40 acre homestead from the U.S. government outside of town on what is now Saxony Road, just north of Cottonwood Creek.⁸ Kincaid, whose parents were also American, was born in Washington, D.C., fought in the Civil War with the Cavalry from Ohio from 1863 to 1865,⁹ and came to the Pacific coast by way of Panama with the U.S. army in 1867.¹⁰

In 1882 he settled in Encinitas with his wife Anitilda de la Luz Vallejo (“Annie”, 1853-1930), daughter of Spanish-born Mariano Vallejo, a California military commander, politician, and rancher who shaped the transition of California from a Mexican district to an American state.¹¹ The lumber for the Kincaid house was brought up from San Diego and Kincaid lived there for many years with Annie and their four sons.¹²

In his 1912 obituary, Kincaid was heralded as “the first [railroad] conductor to run a train out of San Diego.” He also served in numerous civic functions, including the school board and the position of clerk in the 1900 civic election.¹³

Kincaid was a pioneer farmer and a survivalist. Evidence of this is found in Cozens’ history as she describes the big flood of February, 1884 as a difficult time when Encinitas was cut off from the rest of the world for two months and supplies ran frightfully low. Railroad tracks and roads were washed out, and a few brave folks made the long trip to San Diego on horseback or on foot to bring back supplies. One of these was Lemuel Kincaid, who “walked clear to San Diego, wading through the surf around the
mouths of the sloughs. He started home with a half-sack (50 pounds) [of flour]. When he got to a place near the Torrey Pines Garage [at the mouth of the Los Peñasquitos Creek] he added about 50 pounds of grape cuttings to the load. This . . . was divided among several families” when he returned.  

Kincaid’s decision to homestead near Encinitas proved to be propitious: In 1923, Paul Ecke, Sr. purchased the Kincaid ranch for $6000, and as late as 1967, “the Kincaid home was still intact, although it had received generous amounts of alteration and addition as a portion of the office space used . . . by the Paul Ecke Poinsettia Ranch.”
Lemuel Kincaid's obituary 1912

Source: “First San Diego Conductor Dead”
Edward G. Hammond

Historian Mac Hartley continues to describe the early 1880s, “Pioneers were arriving in Encinitas from other parts of the United States and the world. Soon the population of the area would double from eleven to twenty-two with the arrival of one family, that of Edward G. Hammond [1839-1907].”

Hammond transferred his experience as a builder and cabinetmaker from his native England to Encinitas and became one of its important founding fathers. Hammond and his wife Jane Latchford Hammond (1841-1922) had the pick of sites for their new home, and they purchased nearly 400 acres of government land to homestead, naming it Sunset Ranch. Their house adjoined the Kincaid property, and was located at the end of Woodley Road in Encinitas, giving the family a commanding view of the ocean to the west and the mountains to the east. Son Sam Hammond ran the ranch with its horses and cattle, sometimes relying upon barrels of water collected from nearby Cottonwood Creek when their rain cisterns ran dry.

Today, the swimming pond enjoyed by the Hammond children—which itself is an offshoot of Cottonwood Creek—and several other features from the original ranch can be seen integrated into the Encinitas Ranch Golf Course at the corner of Leucadia Boulevard and Quail Gardens Drive. (Some historians report that some of the Hammond land is today part of the Ecke ranch, though this is unconfirmed.)

Considering there were seven children in their party of 11, one of the highest priorities for the Hammonds was to establish a school, so Edward and his son Ted undertook its construction. In addition to the schoolhouse, which is now the site of the Encinitas Historical Society, Hammond built the city’s first hotel and the Amos Derby house on Vulcan Avenue near the train depot.

With so many Hammond children, the family swelled to include numerous descendants, and their lives were entwined with other key families of the time, some of whom remain in Encinitas to this day. Their Christmas in 1906 was spent entertaining the Kincaids and Cozens, to name a few, and quail hunting was one of the scheduled activities. Daughter Ethel Bell Hammond married Lemuel Kincaid’s son Levi. (Lemuel Kincaid and Jane Hammond both lived in Levi and Ethel’s house in National City in their later years.) And, granddaughter Pamela Hammond Walker is a historian and docent at both the Encinitas Historical Society and the San Dieguito Heritage Museum.

By the late 1880s the total population of the Encinitas area was about 160 people. By 1900, the population of the area (known for census purposes as a “township in the County of San Diego”) had grown to 2,050. Clearly the efforts and diligence of the Kincaid and Hammond
families and others like them laid the foundation for its growth and popularity. And little did they know that those efforts were in preparation for the fabulous flower industry to come.

Edmond G. Hammond and Jane Latchford Hammond c1900

Source: Encinitas Historical Society
390 West “F” Street, Encinitas, CA 92024
New Arrivals with New Interests: 1920s and 1930s

Demands for water in this growing community quickly outran the supply available from Cottonwood Creek. Fortunately, in 1917 this began to change, as Hartley explains:

In 1917, Hodges Dam was constructed to bring water to the Rancho Santa Fe area. . . . In 1922 an irrigation district was formed at Leucadia to also include water supply for Cardiff and Encinitas . . . . About a year after the water was brought in, Encinitas was annexed to the San Dieguito Irrigation District. The flow of water turned on a strong flow of population, and the flower and fruit industries started to flourish. Avocados, a new fruit to the area, were successfully planted and harvested in the Leucadia/Encinitas area.24

Anton van Amersfoort

One of these avocado growers, who was also one of the first three directors of the new water district, was Anton van Amersfoort, (1881-1955), a native of Holland who immigrated to the United States in 1903. In the spring of 1921 (prior to this water availability) van Amersfoort started an orchard of avocados from seed, which he watered by hand. His property bordered Paul Ecke’s ranch to the south.

As late as 1940, when he was 59 and a bachelor, van Amersfoort still owned the property in Encinitas and described himself as a “rancher.”25 (Young neighbor Tak Sugimoto remembers him as “jolly”!)26 Interestingly, Ruth Baird Larabee, founder of San Diego Botanic Garden, purchased the house and 16.5 acres of land from van Amersfoort in 1943. That ranch house is now known as the Larabee House at San Diego Botanic Gardens.27 The drive leading from Saxony Road up through the Gardens was for many years named van Amersfoort Drive.

Anton van Amersfoort in 1920 from his passport application preceding a trip to Holland

Herman Seidler

Ruth Larabée purchased the other 10 acres of her now-famous property from a German immigrant rancher named Herman Seidler (1886-1965). Little information is available about Seidler other than the fact that he was initially a “boarder” on the Paul and Magdalena Ecke ranch (1930) and later acquired the property neighboring theirs to the south.\(^{28}\)

Paul Ecke and Magdalena Maurer Ecke

Two years after Van Amersfoort settled, young Paul Ecke (1891-1987) moved his family poinsettia business from Hollywood to Encinitas virtually next door to Herman Seidler. He and his wife, Magdalena, a native of Switzerland, purchased the 40-acre Kincaid property in 1923 for $150/acre and prepared it for planting.

Ecke and his four siblings were born in Germany to Albert and Henrietta Ecke. Their father moved the family to Hollywood in 1900 and ultimately ventured into agriculture. Paul graduated from Hollywood High School and at age 24 he took over the family ranch in Hollywood, selling off dairy pasture to concentrate on cultivating poinsettias. As affordable land around Los Angeles became ever more scarce, he turned to Encinitas, where the climate was excellent, the water supply good, and the railroad reliable. Life improved further still when Paul Ecke eloped on New Year’s Eve in 1924 with his beloved Magdalena Maurer (1905-1981), a union which, however, was against her parents’ wishes.

At first, the Encinitas ranch produced field-grown mother plants that were harvested in the spring and shipped by railroad to greenhouse growers on the East Coast. However, as author Alison Burns writes in *Legendary Locals of Encinitas* (2012):

Throughout his life, Ecke continued to develop the poinsettia into a highly successful indoor potted plant, eventually introducing over 30 different strains recognized throughout the world. In 1963, Ecke began growing the plants in greenhouses, producing small cuttings in a controlled environment. The cuttings were then shipped worldwide by air freight. Ecke was honored with numerous horticulture awards throughout his life, but his professional achievements were also complemented by his philanthropy.

Content to remain somewhat in the background, Swiss born Magdalena looked after her husband and children while raising chickens, acting as a bookkeeper and secretary, [and] feeding the ranch hands. During the Depression years, she quietly dropped off homemade casseroles at the local community centers. Long after the California economy had bounced
back, she remained deeply involved with a Mexican orphanage, driving across the border once a month, her car stuffed to the roof with as many essentials as she could squeeze in.

Both Paul and Magdalena grew up in an era [in which people] believed strongly in being involved in the community. During the Depression, the Eckes gave each of their workers a plot of land to grow vegetables and slaughtered cattle to provide beef for their families. When their Japanese neighbors were forced into internment camps during the war, only the Eckes and one other family offered to store their possessions.29 (The others were John and Flora Kolbeck, who ran a vegetable trucking business between North County and the Los Angeles wholesale produce market, and warehoused machinery and furniture for removed families.)30

Over the years, Ecke donated money to the Encinitas Union School District. He and Magdalena also donated 92 acres of property to the North Coast Family YMCA (named the Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA), Quail Botanical Gardens, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation for a beach park in Carlsbad.

Magdalena Maurer Ecke and Paul Ecke, Sr., c1930

Hans Hartman

Johannes Henry Berthold Hartmann (Hans Hartman: 1892-1986) lived immediately south of the Ecke ranch in the house now occupied by the San Diego Botanic Garden’s president/CEO Julian Duval. Hartman was born in Hamburg, Germany and arrived in the United States at age 22. In his United States Petition for Citizenship in February 1925, he signed a statement saying, “It is my intention to become a citizen of the United States, and to renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to . . . the German Reich.” 31 Hartman married Paul Ecke’s sister Friedericke Louise Hedwig Ecke (Frieda: 1897-1951), who was also German-born.32

Unlike most of his neighbors who were in agriculture, Hartman was a businessman. However, he did apparently participate in the Ecke business, since a January 4, 1928 article in the San Diego Union reports “Hans Hartman in charge of the farm” when they shipped 200,000 blooms across country during the holidays.33 He was the accountant for the Midwinter Flower Show for many years, and was also somewhat of a thespian with a role in the San Dieguito Players’ “Little Women”34 and leading role in “A Bachelor’s Honeymoon,”35 performed at the newly opened La Paloma Theatre in Encinitas in 1928.

In 1930 the Hartmans and their children Henrietta, Margaret, John, and Marita and one servant occupied this same residence, and he was self-employed as a public accountant.36 One of his clients was the San Dieguito Water District.37 Hartman also owned several other parcels of land between Saxony Road and the Interstate-5 Freeway.38

Tragically, Hartman’s son John’s life was shortened when at age 27, and married to a Japanese American wife, he committed suicide. (See remarks from childhood friend Tak Sugimoto to follow.)
Hartman’s signature on his Petition for U.S. Citizenship November 10, 1926. (Note that he later shortened his name to Hans Hartman.)


Business Ad in the San Diego Union in 1936

Frieda Ecke Hartman, second from right, 1900

Thomas F. McLoughlin

Irish born Thomas F. McLoughlin (1875-1954) moved from Seattle with his wife Nan and two children into the same Encinitas neighborhood as Hans Hartman and Paul Ecke. In 1930 he was a nurseryman growing gladiolas.39  By 1940 he was a foreman for a W.P.A. project, president of the Encinitas Chamber of Commerce, and president of the San Diego County Development Federation,40 and by 1954 he was also appointed as a judge in the local court. Author Robert Melvin, Profiles in Flowers (1989) describes McLoughlin’s contribution to the flower industry as follows:

Those early years saw the migration to San Diego County of many . . . other flower farmers who became the vanguard of the new industry. Seattle grower Thomas F. McLoughlin settled in Leucadia in 1924 after “hunting the West Coast for a rich loam soil suitable for growing bulbs.” He sent to Holland for 98 crates of assorted bulbs—the first ever planted in the Encinitas district. The following year [1925] he and others launched the first annual Encinitas Midwinter Flower Show, which became a local tradition for many years. Paradoxically, almost all the flowers for that first show were brought in from Seattle, Portland and Los Angeles because of a local shortage.

Years later, McLoughlin recalled that the night before the show opened, the area had been pummeled by a heavy downpour. He remembered standing in one of the drenched display tents the following morning, with no one but his dog for company, thinking the whole thing was going to be a failure. Apparently folks were just drying out, however, because by midmorning downtown Encinitas was full of people, the show was packed, and the affair was a great success.

These annual shows [of which McLoughlin was the originator and general manager] . . . helped to promote the Encinitas area as an important fresh flower and bulb producing center.41
Thomas F. McLoughlin 1930

Source: “Bulb Business Reported Good”
San Diego Union, May 1, 1930
Elizabeth Ament Briggs and Son Donald A. Briggs

Melvin continues his story of the flower growers surrounding the Ecke Ranch in Profiles in Flowers: The Story of San Diego County Floriculture, describing the renowned Briggs family:

One of the contributors of flowers to the 1925 show was Donald Briggs (1897-1989). At that time, he and his family were growing gladioli in Chino, California, fighting wireworms and nematodes. McLoughlin, who had known the Briggs family from his Seattle days, induced the family (Charles, Elizabeth and their son Donald) to come to Encinitas, and thus began the 40-year saga that established Elizabeth Briggs’ international reputation as the dean of gladiolus hybridizers. With her bulbs, and son Donald’s growing know-how, the family soon became established as prominent gladiolus growers along the North [San Diego] Coast.

[Elizabeth Briggs, 1863-1960, born in Princeton, Illinois] was a bored Sacramento housewife in 1914 when her husband, Charles Briggs, who was on the road as agricultural staff man for the Sacramento Bee newspaper, brought home an article from Country Gentleman magazine about the exciting and profitable new gladiolus varieties being introduced. “Here’s something you might do to occupy your time,” he told his wife. Indeed she might. Elizabeth Briggs “occupied her time” for the next 40 years, growing and hybridizing gladioli the likes of which nobody had ever seen. After early growing attempts at Sacramento, she tried growing glads at Monterey, Carmel-by-the-Sea, and Chino, California, all with very little success.

Mrs. Briggs, her husband, and her son, Donald arrived in North San Diego County in 1926, [and settled at 1745 Eucalyptus Street in Leucadia, just blocks north of the Ecke Ranch] at about the time new soil fumigation techniques had been discovered. That’s when everything turned around for them. Within a few years they had acres of healthy gladiolus bulbs and flowers, all growing from Mrs. Briggs’ own hybridized creations. The growing partnership she formed with her son, Donald, [and their business named “Briggs Floral”] freed her for the first time from financial worries and allowed her to concentrate entirely on breeding new varieties.

Elizabeth Briggs gloried in “Seventh Heaven,” as she called it—her half-acre hybridizing patch at Encinitas where no one dared disturb even one spike without her approval. There she grew an average 6,000 gladioli a year. From this small plot she supplied the 100-acre Briggs bulb farm
near Oceanside with her own originals that were eagerly awaited by the trade—to the tune of 7 to 10 million spikes per year. Elizabeth Briggs always felt herself blessed in her work.

“Everybody tells me I work too hard,” she wrote. “I don’t call this work. The finest reward in life is finding something to do so fascinating that work seems like play. Well, I’ve been playing for the past 40 years.”

Donald Briggs assumed the family business, and today it is known as “Briggs Tree Farm” and nursery, located at 1111 Poinsettia Avenue in Vista, California.

Elizabeth Briggs, 1936, and Donald Briggs, 1970

Source: Melvin, Robert, The Story of San Diego County Floriculture (Encinitas, California: Paul Ecke Ranch Press, 1989) 17, 31
Elmond G. “Thorny” Thornton

Elmond Thornton (1910-1984) was a pioneer flower grower and wholesaler, one of the leaders along with Paul Ecke and the Briggs family, who established San Diego as the Flower Capital of the World. He was a native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and lived in coastal Encinitas with his wife Helen Weston for decades.43

“In 1932,” Hartley writes, “Elmond G. Thornton borrowed $32 to purchase bulbs that he could plant on rented land. By the mid-1950s [he] had become one of the largest shippers of fresh flowers and bulbs in San Diego County with three hundred acres planted. [An innovator in his time] he was the first to use refrigerated trucks to ship flowers out of state.” 44

Thornton helped create the San Diego County Flower Growers’ Association near the end of the 1940s. One of the main goals of the association was to promote and support the overall interests of the industry and to bring new knowledge to their members. He shipped flowers to every state and many other countries, using his muscle to push the industry outside its boundaries to become more global.

He began with gladiolas, the first flowers grown and shipped in North County, and later added birds of paradise, roses, carnations, and anthuriums. He also processed dried flowers, foliage, pods and branches, both cultivated and wild, and developed a large market for these materials. For years he was active on the transportation committee of the Society of American Florists, and also lobbied the trucking and airline industries locally for fair freight rates for the flower industry.45

After his passing in 1984, the family floriculture business was turned over to his sons Robert and Lewis. For a while they experimented in growing glads in Mexico, which did not prove to be as profitable as they hoped. The Thornton-Blue Pacific floral business is today located at 958 Zona Gale Road in Encinitas, approximately two miles east of the Ecke Ranch.

Elmond G. Thornton in 1976

Source: Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers: The Story of San Diego County Floriculture (Encinitas, California: Paul Ecke Ranch Press 1989) 114
Charles Wright Larabee and Ruth Baird Larabee

In the Ecke ranch neighborhood, Ruth and Charles Larabee, Paul Ecke’s neighbors to the south, were something of an anomaly. They were each independently wealthy and after 1935 did not need to work to make a living, so their pursuits were of a more eccentric and privileged nature. However, they were linked to the Eckes and to Mildred Macpherson (below) by geography, through their friendship, their passion for the outdoors, and their philanthropic generosity.

Ruth Robertson Baird (1904-1969, born in Michigan) was the daughter of a successful banker in Kansas City, Kansas, who also had a multitude of land holdings in the oil-rich fields of Texas. She was educated at Vassar, and married Charles Wright Larabee (1901-1968, born in Stafford, Kansas) in 1926. Larabee’s father owned Larabee Flour Mills in Stafford, Kansas, and was an industrial and civic leader of his time.

The Larabees were adventurers. Early in their marriage they sailed 1800 miles round trip from Kansas City to Chicago on the Missouri, Mississippi and Illinois Rivers just for fun. In 1940, Charles joined eight other explorers on a 1,463 mile voyage down the Green and Colorado Rivers, along with Barry Goldwater, Jr., who later wrote a book about this excursion. Throughout the trip, they corresponded with people on land through carrier pigeons. Charles became an expert on the American Southwest, giving lectures about the Native Americans in New Mexico, and was an accomplished photographer of the romantic and rapidly dying Old West.

In 1942 and 1943, Ruth Larabee purchased Herman Seidler and Anton van Amersfoort’s land, and she and Charles settled on this 25 acre ranch which she named “El Rancho San Ysidro de las Flores.” They spent their days traveling, collecting and planting unusual species of all kinds, with Ruth often planting and tending them herself. Educator and landscape architect Mildred Macpherson was a significant contributor to this unique collection.

Though childless themselves, Ruth and Charles spent a great deal of time with teens, Charles as leader of Explorer Scout troops, and Ruth leader of Campfire Girls and Girl Scouts. Students in their troops experienced once-in-a-lifetime camping trips to Mexico, Catalina Island, and down the Colorado River.

Sadly, the Larabees were divorced in 1950, amidst a considerable degree of scandal. Ruth remained at the ranch, while Charles went to Newport Beach, remarried almost immediately and lived a privileged life there and later in Palm Springs.

In 1956, still living on the ranch, Ruth made arrangements with the County of San Diego to donate the land which was in her name to be used as a public park. Over the years, this park evolved...
into the non-profit Quail Botanical Gardens, and more recently was renamed San Diego Botanic Garden, with an established reputation for its unusual collection and unique location in the middle of urban North San Diego County.

Ruth’s history after leaving Encinitas is sketchy, at best. She was rumored to have gone to Mexico to nurse the poor, and indeed in her will and trust there are numerous people named who were connected to the Nursing School in Puebla, Mexico. She passed away while on vacation in 1969 in a tragic fire at the Tudor era Rose and Crown Hotel in Essex, England, which burned to the ground. In her trust, she left money to 75 people around the country and the globe, one of whom was Dolores Reyna, a Mexican-American who lived on the Ecke Ranch.

Together, Ruth and Charles Larabee created a culture of experiencing the outdoors to its fullest extent, and they made a point of sharing this not only with young people in scouting but also with untold numbers of people in generations to come.46

Charles Wright Larabee c1940, and Ruth Baird Larabee c1950

Source: “Cultivating Their Place in History: The Story of Ruth and Charles Larabee” Sally A. Sandler, 2010, for San Diego Botanic Garden
Mildred L. Macpherson

Mildred L. Macpherson (1918-1973) dedicated herself to landscape architecture and education and was a close friend of Magdalena and Paul Ecke. Born in San Diego in 1918, she attended San Diego State University and later became a certified landscape architect. She and husband James H. Macpherson (1905-1949) lived near Vulcan Avenue in Encinitas, less than a mile west of the Ecke Ranch, and operated the Williams-Macpherson Nursery where today’s Lumberyard Shopping Center stands on Coast Highway. According to Maura Wiegand, Ph.D., author of *San Dieguito Heritage* (1993):

[Macpherson] designed numerous gardens in North [San Diego] County. Many of the plants she and her husband imported were the stock for the start of Quail Botanical Gardens [San Diego Botanic Garden]. Ruth Larabee . . . stocked her home with every new and unusual plant that horticulturist Jim and landscape architect Mildred sold at their nursery. [Mildred] was trustee and landscape chairman of the Quail Gardens Foundation until shortly before her death . . . and the Mildred Macpherson Waterfall at Quail . . . memorializes her contributions. 47

Though childless herself, and a widow at age 41, Mildred Macpherson was a distinguished educator beloved by hundreds of school-age children. She was a teacher and principal at Central School in Encinitas (now Paul Ecke Central School), became the first Dean of Girls at San Dieguito High School, and was the first president of the County Board of Education in California. “Indeed,” as Wiegand writes, “she was the very first woman in the state to be elected to any county board of education. She served continually on the board for twenty-four years and her leadership helped San Diego County during its period of great growth between 1949 and 1973.”48

Wiegand notes that one of Mildred Macpherson’s best friends was Magdalena Ecke, whose son Paul, Jr., she taught for eight years. “Paul recalls . . . Jim and Mildred came over [to the Ecke’s] frequently on weekends and played the role of uncle and aunt to the Ecke children . . . and Magdalena Ecke and Mildred met in a monthly book club and enjoyed traveling together.” 49

In her will Macpherson donated her land on Vulcan Avenue between I and J Street—roughly one mile west of the Ecke Ranch—to the residents of Encinitas, and the acreage was named the Mildred Macpherson Community Park in honor of her lifetime of dedication, generosity and perseverance.
Mildred Macpherson 1950

Source: “Clubs Name Board Aid as Leader”

San Diego Union, April 28, 1950

Historical Context: 1930s to 1960s

In the first half of the twentieth century, stalwart folks in Encinitas experienced along with the rest of the country a land boom and bust, the Great Depression and their sons and daughters going off to war. When the economy failed in 1929, the price of avocados in California dropped so low that many were left on the trees to rot.

A steady migration of Japanese-American vegetable and flower growers came to North San Diego County during this time, enticed by its favorable climate and proximity to the railroad, and, in many cases—like Paul Ecke—because urbanization squeezed them out of Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Prior to WWII, these talented people were much like farmers everywhere: hardworking and struggling to make a living. Then, quite suddenly, everything changed. As Hartley reports:

World War II had a deeply felt impact on the local flower industry. . . . But the most devastating effect was not on plants but on humans. The relocation [beginning in 1942] of Japanese American citizens to camps in Nevada and Arizona tore families and friends apart. Many growers or workers of Japanese descent lived among the families of North County. Many had to leave possessions and property behind. Paul Ecke, Sr. provided an unused storage barn where some of his friends could place possessions they could not take. [One of these families is that of Takeo Sugimoto. Note that Paul Ecke was fiercely opposed to the relocations as he saw his friends’ families uprooted; he himself endured the humiliation of a military search and a bigoted smear campaign for his humanitarian gestures.] Not until five years later were the old and new growers able to bring the flower acreage back to prewar levels.50

After the war, most of the displaced Japanese-Americans did not return to North County, having lost their homes, farms, livelihoods, and the very crops in the ground. But a few were able to pick up and renew their efforts, turning to growing primarily carnations and orchids. Among these were Kat and Yukie Hayashi, and Tami Tayami and Joe Kimura, to name a few.

Melvin explains the ensuing growth of the San Diego flower industry as it blossomed to become touted as the Flower Capital of the World:

A new breed of farmer began to appear. These pioneering horticulturists were, by and large, experienced nurserymen with an outlook that went well beyond the supplying of local markets. Their orientation was toward the large wholesale fresh flower trade . . . and the bulb market nationwide. These new growers leased farm land, planted all the acreage they could afford, prayed for the right weather and hoped for a profit when the crop was sold. [They] came from
all over the United States, Canada, Europe and even the Orient to grow flowers in the fertile soil of San Diego County . . . . With their vast acreages of blooms, these . . . growers brought a new dimension to local agriculture and established a floriculture industry that [remained an important part of San Diego County’s economy for years to come.][51]

These are the years when the flower breeders and growers kicked into high gear, with a momentum and energy all their own, in a steady rise to profitability that lasted, for the most, part until the end of the 20th century.

**Katsuo Hayashi and Yukari Nakamura Hayashi**

The Japanese-born Hayashi family members were vegetable farmers who shared with the Sugimoto and Kimura/Tayama families (see below) the unfortunate and oft-repeated story of being forced to leave their homes in San Diego in 1942, a dark time in America’s history.

Katsuo Hayashi (1898-1993) and his younger wife Yukie Nakamura (1920-2003) had to abandon their house, their belongings and their friends when they were placed in Manzanar Camp in Owens Valley, California.

A heart-wrenching photo of the 40-something Hayashi with his 13-month old son Ronald outside the guard post at the Manzanar Camp is featured in the 2006 book *Images of America: Encinitas*, by Kenneth M. Holtzclaw and Diane Welch, on p. 22. Pictured in Katsuo’s face as he supports his wobbly little toddler are all the hopes and dreams of any first-time father, yet in circumstances completely outside his control and difficult to imagine. The story that accompanies it reads,

Ronald Hayashi was only a few months old when his family was relocated to the Manzanar Camp in 1942 . . . . Despite the harsh living conditions, the Hayashis were able to befriend the guards who gave Kat Hayashi a fishing pole, enabling him to provide extra nourishment for his wife, Yukie, who was expecting their second child.][52]

Fortunately their story ends well. In time, after WWII, the Hayashis managed to overcome this personal travesty and eventually established a floriculture business growing carnations in Encinitas. They had the second child, Vicki, and proceeded to thrive in their business on Lake Drive in Cardiff, (two miles southeast of the Ecke Ranch), staking their claim in the Flower Capital of America along with numerous others of their peers. Son Ronald, he of the unsmiling gaze, later married Mary Beth Denk, daughter of a prominent east Encinitas family.
Katsuo Hayashi with son Ronald 1943 at Camp Manzanar
Yukie Hayashi with Ronald 1943
Yukie Hayashi with carnations 1965 in Cardiff

Source: Courtesy of Mary Beth Denk Hayashi, in Holtclaw, Kenneth M, and Welch, Diane, *Images of America: Encinitas* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing 2006) 22, 23
Takeo Sugimoto

The Sugimoto family’s story is particularly moving, a clear example of the difference that was made Paul Ecke’s benevolent actions in 1942. Sugimoto’s Japanese-born parents were vegetable farmers in Encinitas beginning in 1925. When Tak Sugimoto (born in 1927) was 14, he and his mother Yoshie and his siblings were separated from their father and relocated to the “Colorado River Project”, a fancily named detention camp in Arizona. Sagiro Sugimoto died of TB while Tak and the others languished in detention, and his ashes were sent in a small cardboard box to his wife. Author Alison Burns recounts more of the story in her 2012 book Legendary Locals of Encinitas:

Because the Oriental Exclusion Act prohibited Asians from owning land, the Sugimoto family had only been able to lease their 50 acres until one of their sons turned 21. Like so many Japanese families, they lost everything when rent and taxes went unpaid during their enforced absence . . . . But there was one bright spot: Their neighbor, Paul Ecke Sr., himself a German immigrant and therefore in danger of coming under the spotlight, courageously offered to store his Japanese neighbors’ possessions. Sugimoto remembers that when they returned at the end of World War II, they started their brand new life with nothing but the truck they had left with Ecke. 53

As it turned out, that truck was their only means of earning a living. The truck enabled them to leave Encinitas when the San Diego produce markets were still biased against Japanese-grown vegetables. They then shared their truck with a farmer in Fontana in exchange for his sharing his knowledge and farming acumen with them, and eventually got back on their feet. Tak admits, “If it hadn’t been for that truck, I don’t know how we would have found work.”54

Takeo Sugimoto and Hans Hartman’s son John were the same age and were pals from the time they were kids. When Tak returned from the internment camp John was one of the first to greet him. Sadly, however, John Hartman, who had a Japanese wife, took his own life when he was just 27. Sugimoto describes John’s mother Frieda Hartman as “a wonderful woman who made me lunches, occasionally included me at dinner, and treated me very well.”

Sugimoto went to Chafee College, spent two years in the Army ironically in Japan, and returned to Chafee College to complete his Associate Degree. He and his wife Ruth were married in 1950, after which he joined the National Guard and served in Korea. Finally he returned to California to graduate from the School of Pharmacy at the University of South California.
Sugimoto worked for an independent pharmacy for many years, then bought his own store in La Costa. “But first,” he says, “I came down and visited with Paul Ecke, Sr., to get his advice and reference. He thought it would be a good choice, it was a growing field.”

Today Tak Sugimoto enjoys his five children, seven grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, most of whom live near his home on Tucker Street, west of the Ecke Ranch in Encinitas.

He fondly recalls his childhood in Encinitas. “In those days,” he says, “the countryside was wide open. We were on Saxony, the Ecke’s were on Saxony, and beyond that there was nothing at the bottom of Saxony Road but wide open stretches of land. You could almost count the number of houses. We leased the property, and the irony is that my brother would have been 21 a month after they took us away.” They grew strawberries, green beans, celery, tomatoes, berries, and squash, and took these to sell at local markets in San Diego.

“In a Japanese-American farmer’s family,” he explains, “you had total freedom up to the age of about nine. It was sort of a cultural thing I guess, that as a little kid you could go do anything you wanted. But then when you turned nine they expected you to start working, so from then on I had to feed the horses, goats, and chickens.”

In a rather curious twist, he says, “For me [being in the internment camps] was a very happy interlude. When we went into these camps it was a vacation for me from my farming chores. And you didn’t have to worry about where the next meal was going to come from.”

Takeo Sugimoto in his 1945 graduation from San Dieguito High School

Source: Burns, Alison, *Legendary Locals of Encinitas* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing 2012) 31
Marianne M. Tayama Kimura (Tami) and Joe K. Kimura

Tami Tayama (1931-2004, born in Los Angeles, California) and her family provide another chapter in the Japanese-American story of those who were thwarted by the inhumanitarian relocation efforts. She was ten years old when she and her parents were incarcerated at Camp Manzanar in Owens Valley, California. Tami recalled that in her Manzanar school class none of the other kids would stand up and salute the American flag. However, her father remained staunchly patriotic to America and gave her strict orders to reject that resistance, saying, “I don’t care what everybody else says, you get up and salute the flag, and pretty soon everybody else will too.”55 Unfortunately, Fred Tayama himself suffered from this pro-American position when young Japanese militants of the camp beat him nearly to death. With hospitalization, he recovered, but “When the family returned to Los Angeles after the war they had nothing,” writes Robert Melvin. “Gone were the six restaurants and the real estate they had owned. They would have to start over.”56

Tami’s future was decided by this family turn of events, as well as by the helping hand of Paul Ecke, Sr. As it happened, Fred Tayama persevered in the growing business, importing orchids from Hawaii, and “At the urging of Paul Ecke, Sr., long-time friend who provided the land and assisted with local financial arrangements, the Tayamas relocated to Encinitas in 1960, where, after 15 years in the wholesale flower business, they took up growing,” Melvin reports.57

Tami married Joe K. Kimura (1922-????), a flower wholesaler in Los Angeles, and they became partners in the growing venture. After her father died in 1965, Tami and Joe expanded their acreage to keep up with increased demand at their Los Angeles flower market outlet. They grew cattleya, cymbidium and phalaenopsis orchids and alstroemeria, and in 1984 Tami opened a retail florist shop in Cardiff. Today, the family business, Tayama Greenhouses, Inc., is located in Cardiff, at 710 Requeza Street, about two miles south of the Ecke Ranch.

Source: Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers: The Story of San Diego County Floriculture (Encinitas, California: Paul Ecke Ranch Press, 1989) 52, 53
**Mid-20th Century Labor Force: Mexican American Workers**

Living alongside these innovators and indispensable to their efforts were the Mexican-American workers who made it possible to grow and develop the thousands of acres of poinsettias and flower bulbs. Their Mexican ancestors had owned this land until, in 1848, California was ceded to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War. Their contributions cannot be overstated, yet they are not featured in the history books by local authors like Hartley, Melvin, Wiegand, Welch, and Burns. Agriculture was their life’s blood, and historically second nature to them. It must have been interesting to see how their horticultural practices merged with and helped to shape those of the European and Japanese producers.

Eventually some of the Mexican-American farmers became business owners themselves. Melvin’s book, written in 1989, contains in the list of growers and wholesalers names like Amador, Aquilera, Cardosa, Corrales, Gutierrez, Mendoza, Ortega, Ramirez, and many more, a testimony to the successes of these diligent and hardworking people.

As the world turns, so does the flower industry change. Today, ironically, Mexico is the flower industry’s new darling, as California businesses like the Eckes make the switch and move their grow houses to the more efficient and profitable conditions offered south of the border. As Melvin writes, “The sad truth is that in today’s international flower market, more and more of what happens here is [destined to be] determined elsewhere.”

The nurseriesmen, as they expanded their production, relied on a labor force of local Mexican-Americans and more recent migrants from Mexico. The following people lived on the ranch in 1940, according to the U.S. Federal Census:

- Trini and Amador Antonio Cordero and wife Ramona
- Jesus Maria Garcia, with children Inez and Alfonzo
- Jesus Maria Reyna, wife Dolores
  (Ruth Baird Larabee left $500 to Dolores Reyna in her 1966 trust, the equivalent of roughly $3,500 when adjusted for inflation to 2013.)
- Apolonia Salgado (Cornelia, Carlos, Apolonio)
- Pedro Salvatierra, (Maria, Ricardo, Mariguita)
- Henry Arganda has a picture that may be of interest, phone 760-822-9557.
A Lasting Legacy: Enterprise, Persistence, Philanthropy

Surely, it was an intoxicating time, to be part of the birth and bloom of California’s flower industry as the early growers were party of a legacy for future generations. What might the earliest settlers have seen if they could have looked into the future of the community they founded on these coastal bluffs, blessed with exceptional weather and fertile soil, and later laced with greenhouses and flower fields, as far as the eye could see? Undoubtedly it would have been the view of a virtual paradise.

Despite their diverse nationalities, the Western European, Japanese and Mexican-American immigrants who populated the community surrounding the Ecke ranch were all part of a team, and as different as they were, they created a unified fabric through which several themes were woven, themes which could be considered their lasting legacy:

All were connected to the soil, whether under their feet, in their plowed fields, or in raised beds and trays under greenhouse roofs. Some were dependent on the soil for survival, others for profit, still others for the aesthetics and sheer beauty that only nature can provide. The roots of their daily lives were, and in some cases still are, solidly planted in terra firma by choice, because this was the place where they could carve out their version of the American dream. They were indeed blessed in this placement, since this nature connection is more valuable with each passing day, and the loss of it results in the unfortunate condition San Diego author Richard Louv describes as “nature deficit.” 59

Their is a story of pioneering spirit and all that entails. They were hard-working, persevering, stubbornly independent and bold. They took chances in moving here, in raising their kids, in doing things that had never been done before in ways that had never been considered; they saw a greater vision and were willing to shed the blood, sweat and tears to make it happen.

The people here created a closely-knit community, one which welcomed folks from diverse cultures because they were all focused on the same goal. Their end product was not something mechanical or industrial, not a car or a computer, not a gear or a battery. It was something designed purely for the purpose of enriching people’s lives: A flower! And around this delightful pursuit they created a neighborhood community that took pride in the way they educated their children and placed a high value on helping each other through difficult times.

Woven throughout their stories is a strong sense of pride. From Paul Ecke and his successors taking pride in making the poinsettia the best it can possibly be, to Joe Kimura admiring his perfect cattleya orchid, and Elizabeth Briggs’ passionate quest for the ultimate gladiola. People were just not content to settle for less than the best. They pushed themselves and those around them to excel, to
raise the bar ever higher, and they accomplished this by believing in high standards and a strong work ethic.

And for some, these accomplishments ultimately led to a culture of philanthropy. Paul and Magdalena Ecke were known to give plots of land and a helping hand to some of their workers who were struggling to get started. They generously donated acreage to create the Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA, and their succeeding generations continue this culture of generosity. Their contributions include giving $1.5 million to acquire 60 acres of open space known as Indian Head Canyon (off of Quail Hollow Drive in Encinitas), funding the construction of the Ecke Building at San Diego Botanic Garden, supporting more than 400 youth leagues and sports teams, and contributing money to hospitals and cultural organizations. 60

Mildred Macpherson gave her land for the creation of a people’s park, bathed in ocean breezes and shared by families and children on a daily basis.

And Ruth Larabee initiated this tradition of giving land to future generations in Encinitas when in 1956 she donated hers so that the critical connection between people and their experience of nature could prevail.
Endnotes

1 Within this geographical framework, I have developed a list of people of interest across a span of time from about 1880 to 1960. I have specifically chosen to focus on those closest geographically and culturally to the Ecke family. This agriculture rich land was divided and then subdivided many times over those years, so that the entire roster of residents who lived as neighbors or predecessors to the Eckes is far too extensive to research. I have, therefore, attempted to single out people of particular interest because they played a pioneering role significant to the development of the area and its industry.

In addition, I have tried to include in the list people of various nationalities, including Western European, Japanese, and Mexican-American individuals. For some of these community ancestors, much documentation already exists, and they are the clear forefathers of the area. For others, there is little information and additional research may reveal their role.

2 Definition #2 of the word “legacy”: “Something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past. Synonym: “heritage”. Merriam Webster Online (Encyclopedia Britannica Company Publishers, ????), http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legacy.

3 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage (Virginia: Danning Co., 1999), 59.

4 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 58.


6 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 80.

7 Dates for birth and death are for the most part obtained from U.S. Federal Census records, or from obituaries, or stories from other genealogists or families. To obtain absolutely accurate dates, the best sources are copies of the actual birth and death certificates themselves, which in the case of this report has not yet seemed feasible. Note: The CA Death Records Database will provide specific dates, as well as the Social Security Death Database.

8 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 58.


12 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 58.

Signed into law in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln, the Homestead Act turned over vast amounts of the public domain to private citizens. A homesteader had only to be the head of a household or at least 21 years of age to claim a 160 acre parcel of land. Each homesteader had to live on the land, build a home, and make improvements and farm for five years before he was eligible to "prove up". After successful completion of [all requirements] and payment of [a total of $18] the homesteader received the patent for the land, signed with the name of the current president of the United States. “About the Homestead Act,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. http://www.nps.gov/home/historyculture/abouthomesteadactlaw.htm.

14 Cozens, Annie Hammond, Brief History of Encinitas, July 19, 1947. (Pamphlet printed by the San Dieguito Heritage Museum, 450 Quail Gardens Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024; print date not listed.) 5.


16 Signed into law in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln, the Homestead Act turned over vast amounts of the public domain to private citizens. A homesteader had only to be the head of a household or at least 21 years of age to claim a 160 acre parcel of land. Each homesteader had to live on the land, build a home, and make improvements and farm for five years before he was eligible to "prove up". After successful completion of [all requirements] and payment of [a total of $18] the homesteader received the patent for the land, signed with the name of the current president of the United States. “About the Homestead Act,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. http://www.nps.gov/home/historyculture/abouthomesteadactlaw.htm.


19 Burns, Allison, Legendary Locals of Encinitas, 10.


22 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 82.


24 Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 82.


26 Information from a telephone interview with Tak Sugimoto by Sally Sandler on January 21, 2013. Phone number 760-436-3164.

27 County of San Diego Office of Records, 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92101.


29 Burns, Allison, Legendary Locals, 28-30.


County of San Diego Office of Records, Maps Division. 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92101.


Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 18-19.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 27-29.

Note that sources also record Frank Frazee in this group of leaders; however, he is not included since his business was based in Carlsbad and Oceanside, beyond the focus of this report.

Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 162.


“Cultivating Their Place in History,” the story of Ruth and Charles Larabee, by Sally A. Sandler, Docent/Historian, for San Diego Botanic Garden, Encinitas, California, 2010.

Wiegand, Maura, Ph.D., San Dieguito Heritage (Encinitas, California: San Dieguito Heritage Museum, 1993), 109, 111.

Wiegand, Maura, Ph.D., San Dieguito Heritage, 108.

Wiegand, Maura, Ph.D., San Dieguito Heritage, 109-110.

Hartley, Mac, Encinitas History and Heritage, 14.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 12.

Holtzclaw, Kenneth M. and Welch, Diane, Images of America: Encinitas, 22.

Information from a telephone interview with Tak Sugimoto by Sally Sandler on January 21, 2013. Phone number 760-436-3164.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 52-53.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 54.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 54.

Melvin, Robert, Profiles in Flowers, 132.

