

SIO Director's House (T-16)

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SIO Director's House (T-16), January 1937

A modest redwood bungalow stands in the middle of the sophisticated campus of UCSD's Scripps Institution of Oceanography on La Jolla Shores Drive. The story of this building is at the heart of the history of the campus.

In 1913 La Jollans were just getting used to the new laboratory building designed by San Diego modernist architect Irving Gill built on the area known locally as "those brown hills north of the village," now called La Jolla Shores. The formerly independent little biological station established in 1903 by William E. Ritter with the support of the Scripps Family had just become part of the University of California. Everyone was talking about the road E.W. Scripps built connecting the campus to the village, and now he was building cottages. His sister Ellen Browning Scripps had plans for the construction of a seawall and pier. The locals called the biological station "the logical station" or "the bug house." The scientists who lived there called it "the colony," and E.W. Scripps called it "AN ODD PLACE ...where high thinking and modest living is to be the rule."

Mr. Scripps's plan for the station was simple. He would build about twenty redwood cottages modeled on bungalows that were being built in Kearny Mesa at the time. These would house the staff of the biological station, and any empty cottages would be rented to academic men who wanted to work at the station or needed an inexpensive seaside holiday. A three-room cottage rented for twelve dollars a month. The rent of the cottages would supplement the income of the station.

The Director's House was to be a little grander than the rest. It was to have two stories and its construction was supervised by the director's wife, the formidable social activist and physician, Dr. Mary Bennett Ritter. Dr. Ritter's husband, William E. Ritter, had promised her a lovely retirement house in Berkeley. They had asked their old friend, Julia

Morgan, to design the house. They had Julia Morgan's blueprints in hand when E.W. Scripps and W.E. Ritter agreed that the biological station could only prosper if the Ritters lived in La Jolla year round to oversee its growth. Dr. Mary Ritter found a talented local carpenter, John Morgan, to build the Director's House. The house was constructed at a cost of \$4,000 with funds provided by Ellen Browning Scripps. We don't know if Dr. Ritter gave the builder Julia Morgan's blueprints, but the Director's House resembles those blueprints and incorporates details you can see today in some of Julia Morgan's houses in Berkeley that were built for the Ritter's friends. The house was completed and the Ritters moved in in December 1913.

A lot of interesting people have been in the house. Its residents have included the Norwegian arctic explorer Harald Sverdrup and ichthyologist Carl Hubbs. Hubbs was famous, among other things, for initiating the annual census of gray whales. One February, when illness prevented him from leaving home, he climbed to the roof of the house and counted whales through his field glasses with one arm wrapped around the chimney for support. Visitors to the house included all the local members of the Scripps family, and other distinguished San Diego families including the Wangenheims, Klaubers and Seftons. House guests included distinguished eastern professors like E. G. Conklin, the sculptor Arthur Putnam, and Walter Clark, author of *The Ox Bow Incident*. Oceanographer Bjorn Helland-Hansen was a guest. His missing fingers bespoke his experience in the arctic. Charles Lindberg and his wife buzzed the house often in glider flights during the 1920's.

The history of the Director's House is well documented in the Archives of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, which is located in the Scripps Library. The archives has Dr. Mary Ritter's diaries, the Ritter's guest book, E.W. Scripps's correspondence with the Ritters, the 1912 blueprints that Ellen Browning Scripps had drawn up for the campus, and lots of pictures of the campus and the house. These documents have been useful in the renovations of the old house, which has served as headquarters for the California Sea Grant College since 1975.

The house was renovated in 1997 at the initiative of Tom Collins and the Scripps faculty, with support from Alan Jaffee, Judith Munk and the E.W. Scripps Associates. The building is a reminder of the modest and idealistic origins of what has become the largest oceanographic institution in the world.