

Bonita Museum and Cultural Center Collection Overview

The Bonita Museum and Cultural Center's collection consists of approximately 830 artifacts, 1188 historic photographs, 119 art works by local artists and 203 books and periodicals. The museum stores and collects items that have cultural and historical significance to the area of El Rancho de la Nacion. This area encompasses Bonita, National City, Chula Vista, Sunnyside and Sweetwater Valley, communities in San Diego County's South Bay.

Many of the historical objects in the collection relate to the area's origins as agricultural farms and cattle ranches. During the later half of the 19th century El Rancho de la Nacion was a fertile area for growing oranges, lemons, olives, lima beans and producing honey. Cattle and dairy farming was prevalent and the surrounding communities developed around the lucrative agricultural business. The collection at the Bonita Museum and Cultural Center retains artifacts from these times and we proudly act as the stewards for the agricultural and farming tools that the area's original settlers used to cultivate the land. These items include artifacts such as milking machines, glass dairy bottles, antique cream separators, butter molds and churners. Other related items consist of manual tools, branding irons, seed sowers and grain grinders.

The success of the dairy and agricultural businesses brought the production of a railroad for transporting the goods out East. Our collection contains objects relating to the construction and maintenance of the San Diego & South Eastern Railway. Other artifacts convey the history of the area before the arrival of European settlers, the museum documents the pre-historic origins of the area and houses fossils and archival material such as the Excavation and Analysis of CASDI - 1077 in Sweetwater Valley which describes the excavation of a pre-historic site near Allen School in Bonita in 1988.

The museum strives to preserve the Native American heritage of the region as well and counts artifacts such as metates (mortar stones), manos (stones used with a mortar) and pottery among its collection. Other information relating to the

Native American groups of the area, including the Kumeyaay, can be found in the museum's archives.

As the museum concerns itself with the human aspect of our area's history the collection contains domestic items that provide insight into the daily lives of people before the technological age. These items include oil lamps, manual coffee grinders, irons, and discount stamps. Objects, which in their time of origin were mundane and common but today seem foreign and unusual as their presence has disappeared from contemporary homes. These objects offer perspectives into how people lived, cooked, cleaned and even groomed themselves. The collection also documents oral histories from some of the community's oldest members in which they describe their personal experiences growing up and living in the South Bay.

Interesting components of the collection include military artifacts that were donated to the museum by members of the community who served in the armed forces or by their family. Notably we have a collection of personal letters written between 1917 and 1945 by a soldier who served in WWI and WWII. The soldier writes letters to family members living in the area and in one letter describes being in Paris during the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

We have an interesting collection of rare and contemporary books, some of which copyrights date back to the mid 19th century. Other books document community members' reactions to historic events such as Fred T. Hosaka's book *A Japanese Immigrant in America*. Hosaka lived in Sunnyside before 1945 and describes his experiences as a Japanese American during and after WWII. The museum's collection originated with photographs and we have a range of original photographs that record the history and geography of the area. These items are important to the collection and provide first hand documentation of the area as well as serve as valuable research tools.

The collection at the Bonita Museum and Cultural center strives to conserve the history of our community through the preservation of objects, art, books and photographs. We feel that by remembering and understanding the people who developed this region we can better understand our communities and our place in

them. As such we value our region's history and culture and seek to promote that appreciation through educational initiatives and community involvement.