

## HISTORY

### **Birch Aquarium at Scripps**

*Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego*

Generations of Americans have discovered the ocean world through the exhibits and educational programs at the aquarium-museum associated for more than a century with Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Today, more than 400,000 people visit Birch Aquarium at Scripps each year.

#### **An Aquarium Since 1905**

Since its creation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Scripps Oceanography has maintained a public aquarium. Scripps founders felt a deep commitment to communicating scientific findings to the general public and pledged in the institution's founding bylaws to always maintain such a facility.

Scripps was formed in 1903 when UC Berkeley zoologist William E. Ritter joined community leaders such as newspaper tycoon E.W. Scripps, philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps, and physician Fred Baker to charter the Marine Biological Association of San Diego, predecessor to today's institution. That summer Ritter conducted a field session in marine biology at a temporary location in the boathouse of the Hotel Del Coronado.

By 1905, the researchers had outgrown the modest laboratory and moved to a small laboratory at La Jolla Cove that cost \$992 to build. The "Little Green Lab," named for its color, featured the institution's first public aquarium exhibit.

Two years later, the association purchased for \$1,000 more than 170 acres of pristine property at La Jolla Shores from the City of San Diego at a public auction. The first permanent building at the site – designed by architect Irving Gill – housed the aquarium on the first floor and the oceanographic museum in an upstairs lecture hall. Today, this building, the George H. Memorial Marine Biological Laboratory, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and houses Scripps's graduate education office.

#### **First Sole Aquarium in 1915**

In 1915, the first building devoted solely to an aquarium was built on the Scripps campus. The small, wooden structure contained 19 tanks ranging in size from 96 to 228 gallons. The museum was housed on the ground floor of a nearby building. Plans for a new aquarium were delayed until after World War II.

## After the War

The Scripps Aquarium-Museum opened in 1951 and named to honor former institution director T. Wayland Vaughan. The three-story facility served the institution for more than 40 years as Scripps Oceanography's window to the ocean world. A ring of 18 tanks – the largest at 2,000 gallons – surrounded a central museum of glass exhibit cases displaying Scripps research projects. Within a month of its opening, visitors from all 48 states had signed the guest book.

## Birch Aquarium at Scripps opens

A fund-raising effort for a larger aquarium-museum kicked off in 1985 when the Stephen and Mary Birch Foundation donated \$6 million to the new facility. In total, \$10 million was raised for construction and initial exhibits.

Birch Aquarium at Scripps opened on Sept. 16, 1992 atop a picturesque bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean and Scripps Oceanography campus. The aquarium is designed around a central lobby with entrances to main interpretive areas:

- **Hall of Fishes**, featuring about 60 tanks of Pacific fishes and invertebrates; the largest habitat is a 70,000-gallon kelp forest.
- **Scripps Explorers Gallery**, showcasing cutting-edge discoveries of Scripps explorers in climate, earth, and ocean sciences through interactive exhibits.
- **Preuss Tide Pool Plaza**, overlooking the Pacific Ocean with three living tide pools for hands-on discovery.
- **Smargon Courtyard**, overlooking coastal bluffs and includes a 13,000-gallon shark reef tank and *Wonders of Water* exhibit stations.

Birch Aquarium at Scripps is also an “aquarium without walls” where visitors enjoy strong exhibit and education programs based on the foundation of scientific expertise at the research institution. The aquarium disseminates these programs locally and throughout the nation through publications, curricula, multimedia presentations, traveling exhibits, educational initiatives, outreach programs, and teacher training designed to stimulate curiosity and critical thinking about the natural world.

Since its opening, the aquarium has hosted nearly 5 million visitors from across the United States and around the world. Visitors have included U.S. presidents and other high-ranking government officials, royalty, and Hollywood superstars. The aquarium remains one of San Diego's top cultural destinations.

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