Clare Crane (CC): She was such a character that everybody knew her. Nobody was born, or married, or died without Kate Sessions furnishing flowers. If anyone built a home, she was the one who furnished the landscaping. Her name became synonymous with horticulture and flowers in San Diego.

Peter Hamlin (PH): It was a time when women were not even expected to go to college and a woman was hardly encouraged to study science but Kate Sessions pursued a successful career in the field of horticulture. Her life’s work, her plantings, and the plants she introduced into San Diego that thrived in our climate have immeasurably contributed to the beauty of the city. The life of Kate Sessions is the subject of this program and the series "Twelve Who Shaped San Diego." I’m Peter Hamlin and joining me is San Diego Historian and Chief Historical Consultant for these programs, Dr. Clair Crane. Clair, I think people listening to our series will notice a real change of pace on today’s program. We’ve up to this time been talking about the discovery, exploration, and development of San Diego. We have seen railroads installed, we have seen the streetcar system, buildings are beginning to be built in the downtown area, and now we are looking at a woman, Kate Sessions, whose real strength and whose real contribution to the area was beautifying the city as a horticulturist. And so I see a real change in emphasis—now that the city is really establishing itself as a city—to things like beautification.

(CC): I would certainly agree with you about that. I think that her real role is that of having beautified the city through the introduction of particular kinds of plants and trees that do well in this soil and climate. She made a great study of that and we certainly would not begin to have the kind of greening of San Diego that we think of as so characteristic if it hadn’t been for Kate Sessions. This was just a pretty dusty, almost semi-desert area before the work that she started.

(PH): Elizabeth MacPhail is the author of the book, Kate Sessions - Pioneer Horticulturist, and Elizabeth MacPhail says that Kate Sessions became an important part of San Diego soon after she arrived and became involved in the nursery business but like many other great people, her career didn’t follow a direct pre-planned route.

(CC): I think it was probably accidental, providential as far as San Diego is concerned. As a girl, growing up in Oakland, she was very interested in flowers and horticulture and at that time it was a hobby of collecting flowers and drying them and pressing them. She had her own little collection of dried flowers but it wasn’t until she graduated from high school, in 1876, that she was given a trip to the Sandwich Islands which we know of as Hawaii today, and that was a very unusual trip because people didn’t go to Hawaii.
like they do today as tourists. But she went with some friends and was gone about two months and during that time she saw the beautiful flowers of Hawaii, the beautiful trees, the palms particularly and ferns impressed her. When she came back, she thought how wonderful it would be if some of those beautiful flowers could be developed in California. Then she went to the University of California at Berkeley and she studied and took a science course and later a chemistry course. There was an agriculture course but she did not enroll in that, obviously because it was thought that it was not suitable for a woman.

When she came out of the university, she was prepared for nothing except teaching as was the case in those days because she was a woman and had this education, a teacher was about the only occupation that would be appropriate. While she had been in Oakland, she became acquainted with a friend, Rosa Smith, whose father happened to be in the School Board in new San Diego. In 1883, in the Russ School which was the main school in San Diego, the principal retired or wanted to resign and the School Board was looking for a new principal. Mr. Smith, the father of Rosa, wrote to his daughter in Oakland and asked her if she could recommend anybody. She told several of her friends about the job and job opening and Kate applied and was offered the job as principal of Russ School. This, of course, was quite an important job for a woman to be a principal. She came down to San Diego, not knowing what to expect because she had never been here before. She probably was surprised at just the little village that it was and if not quite discouraged, within a few months the former principal decided to come back. She was demoted to Vice Principal. As Vice Principal she was also teaching. She lasted only for a year. She was unhappy teaching and while probably a good teacher, she just didn’t care for it and there were a lot of problems for teachers particularly with pay and working conditions.

In 1885 she went up to San Gabriel to teach. While there, friends that she had made in San Diego decided to go into the nursery business, and they knew that she was interested in flowers and horticulture. They wrote and asked if she would like to come back to San Diego and go into business with them. This was a wonderful opportunity for her so she came down in 1885 and started her nursery with people by the name of Blazedale. When Coronado opened up in 1886, she and Blazedale bought almost a whole block of Coronado and set up a nursery there. They broke up their partnership after a couple of years but she carried on her nursery on Coronado and had a little sales outlet for flowers at 5th and C in San Diego. That’s how she got her start. It wasn’t anything that she had planned for or had gone to school for and probably would have been the last thing on earth that she thought she could ever actually do but something she was glad and loved to do.

(PH): In fact, Kate Sessions’s interest in plants rapidly became an all consuming passion.
Her whole life and her whole interest was in horticulture. She did not have an interest in anything else; if it did not affect her plants, or her trees she was not interested. Her mind was blank to everything except horticulture.

There is a nice poem contained in Elizabeth MacPhail’s book about Kate Sessions. It is a poem that evidently Kate had copied herself into her scrapbook and that she must have loved. It goes like this: I long to dig and plant things in the Spring, to feel the brown earth crumble in my hands, to hear life all around me wake and sing, the soul has roots too in the rich dark land.

She really had a tremendous impact on the horticultural development of this city as a whole and it is for her work in Balboa Park that she has been especially praised, and in fact has been popularly called the Mother of Balboa Park.

Well, as far as the park was concerned, it just nothing but barren mesa and it was her vision, but also George Marston’s vision, that there could be a park development there. Very early, in the 80’s, there were efforts to plant trees in City Park. The foresters had a day of planting and school children, on Luther Burbank’s birthday, would plant trees on City Park land. Then, about 1892, she decided that it would be a good idea if San Diego would allow her to have her nursery in Balboa Park. The land downtown was getting too scarce so that she couldn’t expect to lease any large amount of land in the downtown area and it was getting too difficult transporting things from Coronado over to San Diego. She prevailed in the City Council to lease her some land in what was City Park and they agreed to lease her 30 acres up at the corner of 6th and Upas. In order to get around the law, they designated her as City Gardener. This was because leasing park land to private firm or business would not be looked on with favor for City Park land. Her rent was for her to plant a hundred trees in the park each year and make 300 trees available to the city in boxes, in crocks, that they could use for city buildings nd schools and street planting. So those were the terms of her lease and she remained there at the northwest corner of the park up until 1903, for about 10-11 years, and many of the trees there in Balboa Park in that section are ones that were planted when she was there with her nursery.

Figuring that out, it comes to over 4,000 trees for a single person to plant, that’s really quite an incredible accomplishment.

Well, yes, and of course we are pretty familiar with the fact that Kate Sessions was responsible for a good deal of the planting in Balboa Park but, of course, these other trees which were planted elsewhere in the city were planted in areas that were public along the streets or around public buildings such as schools and things of that sort. She also helped to landscape many of the canyons in Mission Hills and that area. We look at this and we
think of it as being natural but if you see some of the photographs that were taken around 1900 or in the early 20th century, it becomes crystal clear that those trees weren’t there at all.

(PH): It’s really hard to imagine, especially Balboa Park, in the days when it did not have the lush plant growth, almost none of it native to the park. It is also hard to imagine without the buildings that are really a familiar part of Balboa Park to us today. Sam Hamill came to San Diego in 1909 and he remembers the park at that time as being singularly unimpressive.

Sam Hamill (SH): The park was a park in name only when we came. 6th avenue was dirt, there were very few paved streets. As soon as you got out of the central district, the streets were all just dirt streets, few curbs, few sidewalks. Many of the sidewalks were wood and I can’t say that I have any recollection of Balboa Park as a place where kids used to play, because where we built on Fern Street, all we had to do was walk one block East and we were in the same sagebrush, rabbit-infested hillsides that comprised Balboa Park.

(PH): Sam Hamill grew up in San Diego and became a successful architect and he was involved in the reconstruction of some of the buildings that had been first built in the Park for a great exposition that took place in 1915, he remembers seeing that 1915 exposition as a boy.

(SH): I was only 12 when the Exposition opened so naturally I didn’t see much of the design stage or even of the construction stage. When I saw it, it was open with full flair and flags flying. I was a curious little guy, wandering around and trying to get free samples of things - blackjack chewing gum was one that had a machine working. You could see it spewing out all of those little wrapped pieces of gum. I knew where everything free was in the Park, and along with that, without my knowing it, I was exposed to real architecture of which we had had very very little in San Diego - practically none. I didn’t realize at the time but I was then being exposed to a cultural background pattern which I now believe to be superior to any similar cultural group in Mexico or Spain, and yet it breathes the very essence of those two civilizations and it is something that I have striven all my life to sustain and retain, I hope others will now pick up and continue as has been so wonderfully done in the rebuilding of the Casa Del Prado.

(PH): The architecture is a reflection of our Hispanic heritage and its origin has been discussed by many scholars, Sam Hamill finds the best analysis to be that of Eugene Noihouse.

(SH): In Eugene Noihouse’s (?) book, he gives a very careful analytical, philosophic study of the background of the architecture, not only our own exposition buildings in the 1915-
1916 group but also of architecture in California. Many people called it mission architecture and other different things, but he labels it more correctly as Spanish-Mexican which is better than Spanish-Colonial as a definitive name because not all the colonies of Spain in any degree measured up to the great flourishing of architecture which occurred in Mexico itself. That was probably superior in many respects to the architecture of the period in Spain. In fact, the most prominent architects of Spain, because of the money being in the New World, they left Spain and arrived in Mexico.

(PH): Well, the first Exposition resulted in the real development of Balboa Park and I am curious how that exposition came about, why was it set up?

(CC): The Chamber of Commerce had discussed methods by which San Diego could put itself on the map, you might say, and make itself known as a tourist attraction and specifically, finally, in 1909 a banker, G. Aubrey Davidson, suggested that an exposition be held in San Diego to commemorate the completion of the Panama Canal. This would advertise San Diego as the first American Port-of-Call after ships had passed through the canal. The canal was due to be finished sometime around 1914-1915. The construction, of course, had been underway ever since about 1904. The Chamber of Commerce and other interested citizens got together and began to raise money, and by 1910, initially put together about a million dollars privately subscribed, and then the city also floated bonds to do some of the buildings in the park. And that exposition was called the Panama-California Exposition. There was a lot of rivalry between San Diego and San Francisco to obtain federal and state funding for this exposition and San Francisco finally won out in the competition and was named the official site and did receive much more money from federal and state government for its buildings. The San Diego exposition then had to be scaled down somewhat and perhaps that's one of the reasons that we have such a fine group of buildings. They concentrated, instead of on what most World's Fair's always have been -- and that is a lot of industrial exhibits -- they concentrated instead on cultural and artistic exhibits and they could do these in smaller spaces and didn't require the larger buildings that one does for showing how things are made and produced and so on.

(PH): Well, the style of architecture is really a symbol of San Diego in many ways, I think. You have often said the California Tower is really San Diego to a lot of people. I am curious how this particular style of architecture came to be established as the architecture for that exposition. How did the design for the park and its plan come about?

(CC): Well, that's a very interesting story. One of the men who was active in planning for the exposition was Charlie Collier, Colonel D.C. Collier, and Collier's idea was to have a little,
miniature Spanish Colonial city and have all of the buildings look as if they were part of the same plan. His initial idea was to have these buildings near where San Diego High School is now. He also thought of these in simple terms, what you might call Mission architecture and one of the outstanding authorities on Spanish architecture was Bertrahm Goodhugh and he was invited to come from New York and discuss with the committee how they might implement these ideas. Goodhugh was a very, very charismatic personality and apparently he just bowled over the committee and said well, it will be much more attractive if the buildings are located across the canyon in more or less the center of the park and can be approached by a graceful bridge. Goodhugh’s idea also was to use a much more elaborate style of architecture instead of the simpler Mission style with very, very plain walls. Goodhugh wanted and was successful in getting the committee to agree to this more elaborate style, sometimes called Spanish Renaissance, or Plotteresque, or Churguesque. These are several different terms that are used for it but it is a style of architecture that has a great deal of surface treatment, very elaborate decoration under the eves, doors, and windows. The sculptured facade of the Museum of Man, for example, is like that of a cathedral. The idea for doing a group of buildings in the manner of a city apparently was Collier’s but it was Goodhugh who really determined where they were going to be and that they would be in a much more elaborate style.

(SH): He immediately set to work and devised a more exciting setting for this complex of buildings. He selected, he didn’t devise it, God devised it. The landscape architect who had participated in the first selection resigned forthwith and we had a new landscape architect. The great Laurel Street Bridge was seen by many as a handicap, a dollar-consuming handicap, whereas to Goodhugh it was a great opportunity to capture one of the most exciting remnants of Roman civilization as it was left in Spain and Segovia and as equally exciting throughout Mexico, and Catatro and other wonderful bridges and aqueducts of that particular type. Goodhugh selected as his ground planner a man who later became famous in his own right, Clarence Stien. Stien was recognized finally as the Dean of City Planners of the United States and he was well recognized abroad, in England particularly. Clarence Stien died a few years ago and we have lost a great man. Incidentally, his education was at the Acolubozare in Paris and the Bozare was Anethema to Goodhugh. It’s a miracle that Goodhugh ever employed Stien in the first place. Here was Stien, a young Jewish boy, all apologetically hammering on Goodhugh’s door looking for a job and I say apologetically because it was his meekness, his persistence in coming back time after time on a weekly basis. He used to go in there, so Stien told me, said "Well, now do you have a job opening yet?" Finally, Goodhugh asked him "What do you have there with you?" Stien had taken some of his Prochazs from the Acolubozare and also a small notebook of sketches. Goodhugh dismissed the Prochazs of the Acol as not wanting to see them but he said "what do you have in your book?" These were sketches of
small parish churches in England and Goodhugh was so entranced with these that he employed Stien on the spot.

(CC): Well then, how about Carlton Winslow who, as I understand it, designed a number of the buildings along El Prado?

(SH): That's true. Carlton Winslow was a member of Goodhugh's staff in New York and Goodhugh, with the volume of work that he had and with his center of operation being in New York, he sent Winslow out here as his representative. Goodhugh retired from the later buildings after the California Group was designed and that, by the way, was all designed in the office in New York and Winslow was left with all the other buildings.

(PH): Clare, we've heard a number of names introduced to us, people that had been important to the early development of Balboa Park, its design, and I am curious if that design for the first Exposition was an important project in terms of architecture, park planning, city planning, landscaping, things like this. Was it an important project in those terms on a national scale?

(CC): Yes, it certainly was and one of the remarkable things about it is that the buildings were not only so well designed but they have become loved by so many people that they were retained, even though many of them were only designed to be temporary. They were built of lath and plaster and Goodhugh himself recommended that many of them be demolished after the exposition. But they have been loved by so many people that repeatedly there have been groups of people who organized and saved the buildings time after time. This is quite unusual when you look at other exposition sites: New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal and many other places where there have been world's fairs, they are a shambles a few years after the expositions are over and many of the buildings are, in fact, torn down and perhaps only a few left. We are very fortunate here in San Diego to have that original conception of this little city, an entire group of buildings of a unified architectural style. Unfortunately, we have had some intrusions so that they are not of a unified style anymore but that was the original intention and, to a large degree, if had been carried out.

(PH): Sam Hamill and his partner, Richard Requa were involved in reconstructing some of the old buildings for a second exposition in the 1930's. Many of the original buildings were not intended to be permanent structures. In fact, some amount of controversy has always surrounded the buildings ever since the suggestion was first offered that they be demolished. That was just after the close of the first exposition. At that time, a group of civic leaders got together and raised enough money to save the buildings but that wasn't the last time they were in danger.

(CC): In the early 1930's, there was again discussion about tearing down many of those buildings in the park. This was due to
a suit that was brought against the city of San Diego when one of the palm trees around Horton Plaza had fallen and killed a person and her family then sued the city for negligence. The City Council became concerned that they might encounter similar difficulties because of the buildings in Balboa Park so they were going to demolish them. At that time, Gertrude Gilbert was the spearhead of a group of people who raised funds and raised cain in order to refurbish some of those buildings at that time. They got estimates from Richard Requa and the contractor, Walter Trepke, that were under the estimates that the city had proposed so when they did get this kind of interest and involvement, then several of the buildings were strengthened and refurbished. Because of that, again then was an idea that it would be a good thing for San Diego to have an exposition and that this one would, as had the first one, bring tourists, bring money, and bring attraction to San Diego. As such, WPA funds were then obtained in order to refurbish still other buildings and to provide for the development of new buildings. These are the buildings, not along El Prado but south of there, going down toward the Ford Building. Most of those buildings were done for the 1935 exposition. Again, it did indeed help to pull San Diego out of the Depression, provide jobs for people, and put San Diego on the map as a lovely spot to come for tourists.

(PH): We mentioned that suggestions to demolish the exposition buildings, countered by strong civic efforts to preserve them, so all the way back to just after the first exposition and the debate continues today. Bea Evinson has in recent times been a leader in current successful efforts to restore several important park buildings. She draws the inspiration from a previous civic activist who was similarly committed to saving the buildings. That was just before the second exposition. We mentioned the woman a moment ago, her name was Gertrude Gilbert.

Bea Evinson (BE): That was the time when the red tags were put on by the building inspector, his name was Oscar Knect (?). All the buildings were to go down because they were built in shoddy fashion and they thought we’ll just clear that all. Even at that time, and this argument still goes on now, there was a little argument about passive park versus cultural center. But the cultural center was set at the time of the 1915 Exposition when the Museum of Man was planned, I think, and then the other buildings after that had their cultural impetus and we had this wonderful cultural center. It is unique, all these cultural centers and the San Diego Zoo and the Globe, they are all within walking distance of each other. They can all be improved and that is what we should work on, having them finer and finer so it is the finest thing in the world. It could be, it has the sitting in the middle of a city which is very unusual.

(PH): Bea Evinson is in a long line of committed San Diegans who have devoted themselves to Balboa Park. With Sam Hamill, she
founded the Committee of 100, a group that has been active in efforts to restore and preserve the buildings in the park. The name, the Committee of 100, is somewhat misleading by the way.

(CC): Sam Hamill said one time that he was joking with Bea Evinson when they formed the committee in 1967 and he thought that perhaps only a hundred people would show up and so it got that name, The Committee of 100. Actually, it has probably about 2500 or 3000 members now and they have been active for roughly 10 years. In their literature, they have a very succinct statement, I think, of the significance of the buildings in Balboa Park. They say the 1915 Spanish Colonial buildings in Balboa Park are the vestiges of the Panama-California Exposition. A miniature Spanish city was built with ornate old-world buildings, towers, fountains, plazas, arcades, and tropical gardens. Because of this great civic effort on the part of a small town of 40,000 people, the tourist industry was born, a depression was alleviated and San Diego became a great Naval base. So you can see from that very summary statement that the Exposition played a tremendous role in San Diego’s continuing economy based on the Navy and tourism.

(PH): Balboa Park stands out for a number of reasons. It’s unusual in being such a large park so near the city’s core and it has a wide variety of different cultural resources within a very small distance of one another. Pauline DeGrange is the retired Head of the Parks and Recreation Department. She served with the department from 1941 to 1974. She points out that we owe a great deal to many people for the fact that we have such a resource for the city, going all the way back to the late 1800’s when the land was first set aside as a city park.

Paula DeGrange (PD): It is hard to visualize that people in the late 1800’s could have the kind of vision, when it was a city of about 3000 people, that 1400 acres would be meaningful to the development of the community. This kind of thinking was real thoughtful at the time.

(CC): When they set aside this land, 1400 acres in 1868, many people thought it was ridiculous but the city fathers of that time thought if they didn’t set aside that land, that it might all be bought up and subdivided. Of course, they were hoping that the railroad was going to be completed through into San Diego and that the population would boom and they wisely thought they would set aside this large amount of land at that time, 1868. The reason they chose the site, incidentally, although it had no great beauty of its own -- it was sagebrush and chaparral and had a couple of canyons in it -- they chose it because of its height, and it was valued chiefly in the beginning for the views from it, rather than of it.

(PH): Well, since that time the park has seen many changes and has come to serve many purposes in its role as our major city park.
Certainly, its function for developing tourist interests, whether it was through the expositions in 1915 and again 1935, and then the whole cultural center of the park, being of value to our own community and our own citizens, both county wide, as well as being of interest to tourists, very few tourists or visitors would come to San Diego without making a trip to Balboa Park, whether it is to the Zoo, the Fine Arts Gallery, or the Museums, Natural History Museum, Museum of Man, or even into the Hall of Champions and, of course, soon into a renovated Aerospace Museum.

The Bartholomew Report, which considered proposals for master planning of Balboa Park and redeveloping some areas and so on, mentioned that, as an economic generator, they considered Balboa Park at that time, 1960 when they did the report, was the number-one tourist attraction in San Diego, of course, including the Zoo as part of the park.

Going a little further with the Bartholomew Report, when you indicated the number of interests and how Balboa Park serves the community, I think it is important, and Bartholomew pointed it out, that active recreation areas which particularly is the Morley Field area, off of Texas and Upas, where there are tennis courts and baseball diamonds and swimming pool, the cultural center of the park around El Prado where all the museums are located plus the Zoo as an active spectator area and then again the tremendous areas for picnicking and lawn and casual recreation. As you know, I was Recreation Director prior to the Park and Recreation being combined. So, one of the reasons for combining the Park and Recreation Department was really to attempt to make the parks more available to people for their leisure time, and so with that, with the building of activities to place in the facilities that were recently renovated immediately after the war, began the development of all of our youth symphony, junior theater, use by Sweet Adolines and/or barbershop quartets. They came back into the Globe Theater where they had been prior to the war but were out during the war years, and really, under the leadership of the Park and Recreation Board and then City Council, they were most anxious, particularly the mayor, Harley Knox, was particularly anxious to make the park the going community center of San Diego.

Pauline DeGrange, retired Head of the Park and Recreation Department for the city of San Diego. Now, I would like to ask if that idea of a cultural center in the midst of a city park is unusual as you look around the country.

It is certainly unusual to have the number and quality of museums located so closely together. I think we are very lucky to have this kind of cultural complex in one place and in such a beautiful landscaped place and in such an accessible place. Its right in the heart of the city and having these buildings and then, of course, having the active recreational facilities too that are located elsewhere in the park, really makes this San Diego’s
Community Center. We have something that has been compared to, let's say, the Mall in Washington, D.C. which, of course, has the marvelous Smithsonian Institution Museums. Their facilities and their collections, of course, are far superior to what we have here in San Diego but aside from that, there is a comparison to be made in the fact that we have the different kinds of museums and they are all located together in this lovely area along El Prado and the reason for that, of course, is that the buildings from the 1915 Exposition have been saved. If they had been torn down, probably various museum facilities would have been located in other areas throughout the city and it is unlikely they really would have been drawn together. But the existence of the buildings themselves helped to foster the development of those cultural institutions. Here they were, the space was available, and groups moved in and formed the Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Man, the Fine Arts Gallery, several others.

(Ph): We had had a close look at the development of Balboa Park and we continue with recollections of the woman who was known as the Mother of Balboa Park, Kate Sessions. When Kate Sessions came first to San Diego, she became a school teacher. That profession didn't work out and she soon went into the nursery business but she continued to teach in a more general sense of the word and, in fact, taught many school children about plants. Architect Sam Hamill remembers Kate Sessions from his own school days,

(SH): Yes, people talk about modern school practices and so on. I enjoyed experiences in grammar school in which the kids today don't have the opportunity. You know, Kate Sessions went around from school to school, about once a month and gave nature talks to the 6th, 7th and 8th graders at Brooklyn School and I remember those. She was a woman who commanded great respect and attention. She must have had tremendous character because the children understood that and it was a quiet, attentive group of youngsters that listened to her particularly through her course in acacias and eucalyptus which told us many many things which I have remembered to this day.

(Ph): Another San Diegan who was associated with Kate Sessions is Chauncey Jerabeck. He came to San Diego near the beginning of the century. He brought with him an interest in horticulture from the East and was quite surprised at the different types of plants he found there. He met Kate Sessions and she later wrote a letter of recommendation for his first job here at the Scripps Ranch at Miramar. That letter, by the way, is on file at the San Diego Historical Society Library. Later, he became Park Horticulturist for the city. He served in that position from 1917 until 1956. He remembers Kate Sessions and his early impressions of the plants that grew in his new home town.

Chauncey Jerabeck (CJ): Right after I came to San Diego, about 1910 or 1911, I was working at my uncle's, and a woman across the
street had a little greenhouse and she advised me to go to Kate. She knew I was looking for something to do and Kate had a nursery at Fort Stockton and Stevenson Street. I went out there in a street car and had a talk with her. She impressed me very much as a woman who knew what she was talking about. Of course, coming out here from the East, it was entirely different for me in what I saw out here because everything we grew back there was in clay pots; out here they used tin cans and that was new. The trees I saw here like the bougainvillea; back there, if they had one a foot high, we sold it as a table decoration, and when I saw them over two story buildings... and silk oak, we grew as a table decoration and they grow 35-40 feet high here. So you know I was really impressed with the area and Kate seemed to be so well informed on all the trees which were strangers to me because I had never seen them before. They were mostly Australian trees they had out here then.

(PH): Now, what was she like? You said she impressed you as being extremely knowledgeable about the plants. Was she easy to meet? Was she someone who was very friendly to you at first? What was she like?

(CJ): Well, I’ll tell you what Kate was like at our meeting, like the floral meeting. She could bring in a little weed and talk about it and we all wanted to go home and plant some. That’s how interesting she was.

(PH): She could make almost any plant come to life.

(CC): That’s it. No matter what she put up there, before she got through we all wanted some in our garden. If you wanted to landscape your place and you wouldn’t dig good holes for it, she wouldn’t sell you anything. You had to plant it right or she wouldn’t sell you a thing. You had to have a .35 cent plant and a $5 hole, that’s what she used to say. But another thing about her, if something was going on around town and she saw it and didn’t think it was right she’d stop. If she saw somebody planting something and she didn’t think it was right she’d stop her car and bawl them out no matter who it was.

(PH): Chauncey Jerabek says that Kate Sessions helped him to find his first job, and throughout his career shared her ever increasing knowledge of plants with him. She had a tremendous influence on everyone in this area who shared an interest in horticulture.

(CJ): Well I think all of Southern California might find some people that worked for her now and then and then went into business for themselves. I’m sure there are people like that.

(PH): Retired Park Horticulturist Chauncey Jerabek. Now Chauncey Jerabek did a bit of work in evaluating what Kate Sessions contributions were didn’t he?
Yes, in Elizabeth MacPhail's book on Kate Sessions she includes a list that Jerabek compiled of the trees and plants that Kate Sessions either introduced or popularized and made widely used in Southern California, and that list itself is 4 pages long. That gives you some idea of the tremendous number of different types of plants and trees that she was associated with and advised people to plant, experiment with, and saw to it what was planted in Balboa Park and in the canyons and throughout San Diego.

In many ways through the plants she introduced to this area she determined to a great extent the present day character of San Diego and it is for this reason that she stands out according to her biographer Elizabeth MacPhail.

It was stimulating, the idea that things grew in San Diego that were not what people who came from the East would bring with them. They wanted new things. People who came from the East thought of Southern California as being more or less of a paradise and she was the one who showed them the types of plants that grew here and grew well. And she encouraged them to plant things that beautified the community. Of course, we always had a shortage of water and this has always been a problem in San Diego and so she would show them things that perhaps would grow without a lot of water but which would beautify the city and this is her greatest contribution is the beautification not only of Balboa Park but of all parts of the City through her influence. She was not a hybridizer such as Luther Burbank, in other words she did not develop new plants. What she did was import not only from the United States but from foreign countries of the Americas, the South Pacific and Hawaii and Africa. Many of them came and were sent out to her by the plant introduction agency in Washington D.C. when they found out that she was working at this sort of thing. She developed plants from all over the world and would try them out; some of them thrived and others did not but the bird of paradise is one that she brought in that has shrived in San Diego. The bougainvillea was one of her favorite introductions. The poinsettias were brought in, and she and her brother developed poinsettias and were sending them out in carloads long before Carl Ecke and the people up in Northern County started their developments. In fact the Sessions were the first people to ship poinsettias out of the Southern California area in carloads as a matter of fact around the Christmas time.

Her claim to fame or one of the greatest accomplishments and honors that came to her was in her last year, 1939, when she was awarded the Meyer medal which is given by the American Genetics Association to the person who has done the most in plant introductions in the United States. This was particularly for the cocus palms, the twisted juniper, for bougainvillea and for ice plants. She received that medal in Pasadena; they had given 15 medals and she was the first woman to receive one. And so that was her highest accomplishment that was recognized. But by that time,
the 1930's, she was recognized as the Dean of California Horticulture. Everyone in California knew her and she was well known throughout the world. When she traveled to Europe in 1926, when she came back she said "my name is better known in Europe than it is here in San Diego." Well, actually it wasn't but she was so surprised that every gardener, every nursery she went to in Europe, why, they recognized her name. The federal office of plant introduction in Washington in the Interior Dept. was very interested in her work and the men from there would come out to San Diego and look at her nursery and the things that she had grown and she tried out plants for them to determine which ones would grow well in Southern California and her research was looked on as of great importance.

(PH): Elizabeth MacPhail who wrote the book Kate Sessions: Pioneer Horticulturist.

(CC): I was thinking of Kate Sessions in terms of a phrase that became popular a few years ago -- the greening of America. I think of Kate Sessions as the woman who was responsible for the greening of just San Diego. Then as I thought about that I thought, you know, it's not green -- certainly she was responsible for introducing a great number of palm trees, pine trees, fig trees and other things that are green -- but she also was responsible for, if not introducing, at least for popularizing a lot of other trees that have many other colors, and these have enriched the beauty of the city tremendously. I think of the jacaranda tree, a very unusual tree with its brilliant blue blossoms. And then the acacias was one of her favorites too with its yellow flowers. And of course there's a beautiful tree that's a tribute to Kate Sessions, it marks the site of her nursery in Pacific Beach, it's called a Tipuana tree and it has lovely golden color blossoms. As Elizabeth MacPhail mentioned Kate Sessions was very responsible for introducing bougainvilleas and poinsettias; we have the red colors as well so we can certainly think of her as bringing a great deal of color to San Diego and I think our lives are immeasurably enriched by the landscaping that she, more than any other single individual, is really responsible for.

(PH): Well how would you sum up the effect that Kate Sessions had on the city?

(CC): Well, certainly she was a pioneer horticulturist and she introduced many of the plants and trees that have absolutely transformed not only San Diego but Southern California generally, because her advice was taken elsewhere. You know she first came here, as Elizabeth pointed out, in the 1880's and after a very brief stint as a school teacher and an administrator then she devoted herself to what was her real love, the growing and experimenting with different kinds of plants and trees. She certainly earned that title, the Mother of Balboa Park, because of her activities and planning and landscaping there and converted
that area which was really a dusty relatively barren mesa covered with sage brush and chaparral, to what we now think of as a lush garden setting.

She was I think unusual too in her interest in science certainly when she went to college, that in itself was an unusual thing, and she is the first women to get a degree in science from the University of California going all the way back to around 1880. And then she went on to build this outstanding career in a profession that ordinarily was not one that women went into.

Well, I think another way of looking at Kate Sessions is that she was a conservationist and environmentalist in an era before those terms were anywhere near as popular as they are today. She really understood the scientific aspects of climate and soil. One of the stories that Glen Rick told about her is illustrative of her devotion to the city and also of her scientific knowledge. He said that when she was on her deathbed, literally in the hospital before she died, she asked him to come and talk to her. Glen Rick at that time was City Planner for San Diego and Freeway 5 was about to be developed and she wanted to tell him what kind of things ought to be planted. And he said that he was so impressed with her knowledge, that she knew about the different soil conditions all the way from downtown San Diego all the way on up to Del Mar. And she wanted to suggest the kinds of things that would grow well in those areas and that would not require a great deal of water.

And when I think also in terms of the really lasting significance of what she has done, "I'm reminded of a plaque that I saw in the piazza which is on a high hill overlooking the City of Florence for which Michelangelo did so much in terms of building and sculpture, there is a marker up there on this piazza. It's dedicated to Michelangelo, and if you would see his memorial look around you and I think we can say that also of Kate Sessions when we look at the beautiful landscaping of San Diego, Balboa Park and elsewhere. If you would see her memorial look around you.

(Ph): Dr. Clare Crane, San Diego Historian and Chief Consultant for this series on programs on San Diego history. The next program in our series deals with another great woman, Ellen Browning Scripps. She was a gifted writer - journalist and a newspaper executive. At the age of 60 she retired and settled in San Diego and devoted herself to the promotion of education, recreation and culture. Her life is the subject of next weeks program. "Twelve Who Shaped San Diego" is a series of radio programs on local history, biographies of twelve great men and women who have left their mark on today's San Diego. The programs are heard each week at 12:30 Tuesday afternoon with a repeat broadcast Wednesday night at 8:00. A resource packet is available with the programs. Send $2.00 to KPBS-FM, San Diego, 92182 and ask for the San Diego History Resource Packet. We also welcome your comments on this series the address again is KPBS-FM, San Diego, 92182. I'm Peter
Hamlin series producer thanking you for joining us. "Twelve Who Shaped San Diego" is a production of public radio station KPBS-FM and is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.