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# “Until Kingdom Come” The Design and Construction of La Jolla’s Children’s Pool

Jeremy Hollins

Winner of the Marc Tarasuck Award

The Children’s Pool, located along the rocky bluffs of the Pacific Ocean below the Casa de Mañana, is one of La Jolla’s best known structures. Built in 1930, it was one of the many gifts that philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps gave to the community of La Jolla. Originally heralded a “wonderful improvement” by the press, the concrete breakwater became the setting for controversial debate sixty years after its completion.<sup>1</sup>



*Swimmers in the La Jolla Children’s Pool, July 12, 1953. ©SDHS, UT 84:29642-1, Union Tribune Photograph Collection.*

The debate involved a colony of harbor seals that has inhabited the beach since the mid-1990s. In 1999, one hundred seals rested at the beach, causing San Diego Parks and Recreation to install a rope barrier. The barrier gave the seal habitat a boundary and protected the seals from people. People either supported the seal habitat or argued that the seals prevented swimming, diving, and use of

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the beach.<sup>2</sup> Topics discussed in La Jolla and San Diego newspapers included the possibility of removing the breakwater and returning the beach to its natural state, ways to improve water quality by eliminating seal waste, and plans to enforce the Marine Mammal Protection Act to restrict the public's contact with the seals. Meanwhile, advocacy groups like "Save Our Seals" educated the public about the seal colony at the Children's Pool.<sup>3</sup>

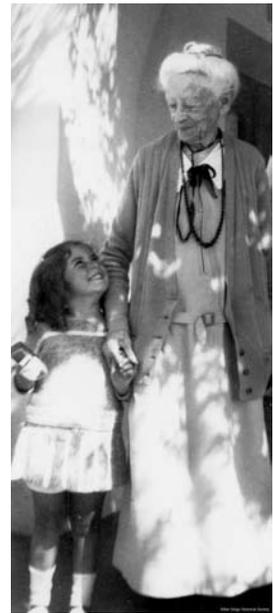
In 2004, the city removed the rope barrier and adopted a "joint use" policy. Joint use allowed members of the public to use the beach recreationally but prevented them from harassing the seals. Volunteers created the "Rake-A-Line" program in order to dissuade the public from crossing a line raked in the sand. That same year, a swimmer filed a lawsuit, claiming that the city violated the terms of a 1931 trust between the State of California and the City of San Diego. The trust required use of the beach as a public park and bathing pool. In August 2005, Superior Court Judge William C. Pate ruled in the lawsuit. He ordered the excavation of the pool and a "return to its pre-seal condition in six months." He intended to lower the beach's bacteria level, which had exceeded state standards since 1997, and to deter the seals from using the site. In September 2005, the city council voted to appeal Judge Pate's ruling. Council members such as Donna Frye felt that the judge had overstepped his authority by ignoring the environmental review process. The city expected it to take a year to complete the environmental studies and obtain permits.<sup>4</sup>

While the controversy has brought increased attention to the Children's Pool, few San Diegans know the origins of the breakwater. Construction of the Children's Pool was an intensive effort that took nearly a decade to complete. Spearheaded by city hydraulic engineer Hiram Newton Savage, architect William Templeton Johnson, and contractor W. M. Ledbetter and Company, the breakwater and pool's lasting design were feats of modern engineering. This study examines the planning, design, construction, and early history of La Jolla's Children's Pool.

### **"For the Health and Happiness of Children"**

Beginning in the 1870s, San Diegans and tourists traveled to La Jolla's coastline for picnics, sunbathing, and afternoons of leisure. Hotels like the Horton House organized day trips to La Jolla, bringing guests and San Diego residents to La Jolla along the dusty, fourteen-mile road. However, many of La Jolla's beaches remained unsafe for swimmers due to the "rapid cross current" that swept through the shore. By 1921, the "Old Ocean" had "taken toll of human life" numerous times and swimming during high tide was prohibited. Signs warned swimmers of the dangers but few people obeyed or even heeded the warnings.<sup>5</sup>

Ellen Browning Scripps (1836-1932), a community resident since 1897, sought a solution to the dangers posed to young swimmers. Scripps devoted much of her time to the welfare and safety of La Jolla's children. An investor and consultant in the newspaper empire run by her brother,



*Ellen Browning Scripps devoted much of her time to the welfare and safety of La Jolla's children.*  
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*Engineer Hiram Newton Savage played an important role in San Diego's water resource development, January 30, 1930. ©SDHS, UT 4759, Union Tribune Photograph Collection.*

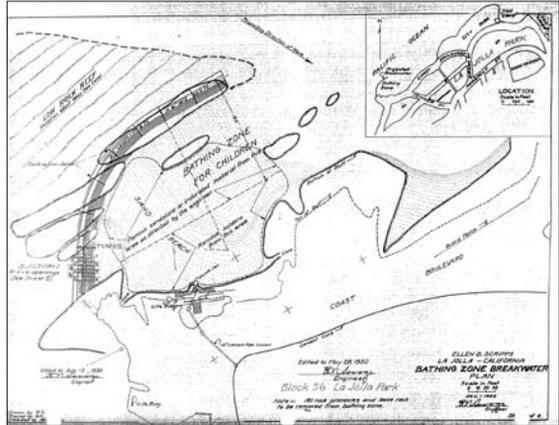
E. W. Scripps, she amassed a considerable fortune before 1890. She founded the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Scripps College, Scripps Hospital, and Scripps Clinic. She built the La Jolla Women's Club and the La Jolla Public Library. She purchased the pueblo lots that became Torrey Pines State Reserve for use as a public park. She donated money to the San Diego Zoo, provided scholarships to the Bishop's School, and helped to build the Children's Playground and Recreation Center. Scripps explained, "I have always had an innate interest in children, particularly those handicapped in life's game." While the creation of a breakwater would ultimately benefit all visitors to La Jolla's beaches, she wanted "the children to have a primary claim" to such a structure.<sup>6</sup>

In 1921, Scripps contracted Hiram Newton Savage (1861-1934) to conduct preliminary surveys for the breakwater and to "work out the issue with Old Ocean."<sup>7</sup> Savage was a hydraulic engineer with a reputation as a tireless worker. Ed Fletcher described him as "positive in his convictions, and would not yield an inch, under any conditions."<sup>8</sup> He had worked on numerous projects, including the Rio Grande Water Company, before graduating with a degree in civil engineering from Dartmouth College in 1891. In San Diego, he served as Chief Engineer in charge of

construction and maintenance of the Sweetwater Dam. Between 1903 and 1916 he served as Consulting Engineer in the United States Reclamation Service, working on dam and irrigation projects in Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming. He returned to San Diego to reconstruct and enlarge the Sweetwater Dam, which had been damaged by the record flood of 1916. In 1917, he became Hydraulic Engineer for the City of San Diego. He supervised the design and construction of the Barrett Dam and new Lower Otay Dam, the enlargement of the Morena Dam and extensions to the city’s rapid sand filtration plants. Most important, he planned San Diego’s future water development, creating detailed plans and estimates for the dams, reservoirs, carrying systems, and purification plants. Scripps hired him for his expertise in water management; she also knew that he had engineered the Zuniga Jetty in San Diego Harbor.<sup>9</sup>

Savage submitted his preliminary findings on March 22, 1923. The preliminary survey looked at the “feasibility, practicability, and estimated cost” of the potential project. His report examined some of the world’s “most important breakwaters,” including ones in Alaska, Florida, and California.<sup>10</sup> He also made careful notes regarding the geology of the region. His top priority was designing a breakwater that was “durable” and “economical.” He was forthright in telling Scripps and the people of La Jolla that he intended to build a structure that was “likely to endure” and remain a lasting edifice on La Jolla’s coastline.<sup>11</sup>

The preliminary survey recommended a site and contained design drawings. Savage chose the crescent-shaped beach area immediately in front of Block 56 of the La Jolla Park subdivision. His drawings predate the construction and design of Coast Boulevard’s Casa de Mañana Hotel, completed in 1924. He wanted to build the breakwater in this location for two reasons. First, this beach was “a favorite bathing place, especially for the women and children of the town.” Despite the dangerous crosscurrent and undertow, many swimmers felt safe here and children enjoyed playing at this location. Second, the natural geology and contour of the site was conducive to building a breakwater. Savage’s drawings noted the beach had a “natural barrier reef curving seaward from a bluff.” The sandstone reef extended in a series of “parallel ribs almost continuously in a general arc.” The proposed breakwater would follow this shape, offering protection from “the prevailing” northwestern waves. The breakwater would be approximately 300.6 feet long with an arc length of 177.8 feet. This was nearly the same length and arc as the barrier reef.<sup>12</sup>



Hydraulic engineer Hiram Newton Savage’s site plans for the Children’s Pool, sketched in December 1922 and modified on May 28, 1930. Note the placement of the breakwater over the natural sandstone reef and the geological contours of the site. Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society.

The breakwater embodied several principles of organic architecture. It was harmonious to the environment’s natural features and it complimented the existing conditions of the site. The 300-foot arcing breakwater would be composed

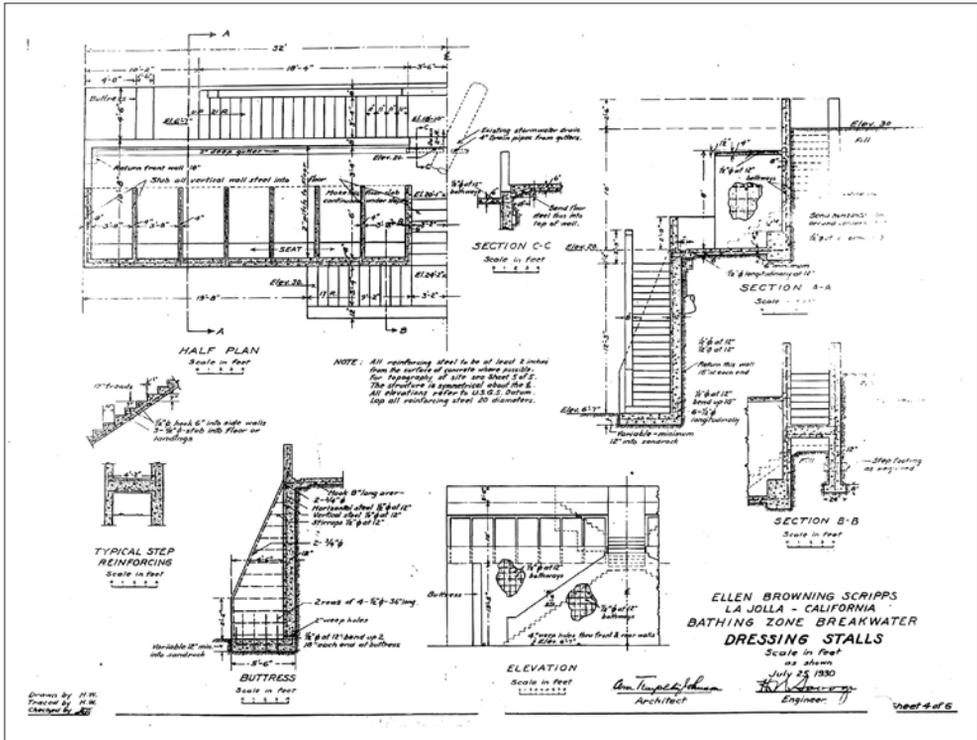
of reinforced concrete. As it extended seaward, 79 percent of the structure would be ten feet high while 21 percent would be sixteen feet high. This created a gradual incline that was devoid of sharp, jagged lines. He planned for “the ocean side having a slope of 10 on 6 to a point 6 feet below the top and an 8 foot radius curved upper portion design to turn the wave back on itself.” The pool side of the structure would have a set of steps eighteen inches high and wide. The steps ran the entire length of the pool and their purpose was “to facilitate the children in climbing around...and to also serve as seats.” At three evenly spaced points along the pool, he designed pilasters fitted with wrought iron ladder steps. The ladder steps provided access to a four-foot wide walkway on top. The top would also have a set of parallel railings, composed of two-inch galvanized pipes, three-feet high, and supported by vertical posts spaced every eight feet. By unifying the structure’s form and function, Savage made sure that the breakwater would not detract from La Jolla’s attractive scenery.<sup>13</sup>

Savage’s design was unlike any structure in San Diego. It materialized from the extensive research he conducted and his vast experience in hydrology. To assist the natural removal of sand from the pool’s bottom, Savage included plans for four sluiceways, four feet wide by six feet high. The sluiceways were “built thru the shore end of the breakwater.” Additionally, Savage proposed building a new sewage drain and catch basins along the Coast Boulevard elevation. The drain and catch basins would “eliminate the ugly washes which have occurred where the drainage has found its way down the bluff toward the beach.” Access to the breakwater and walkway would be through a multi-leveled stairway structure set into the face of the bluff. The stairway structure would have a symmetrical rectangular form, with the stairways centered, and angular concrete piers flanked at the sides.<sup>14</sup>

### **“Go Forward With It”**

Scripps approved the preliminary survey in 1923 but she did not pursue the project for nearly seven years. The *La Jolla Journal* claimed that other “projects crowded in,” and distracted her from the project. In fact, the delay was caused by Savage’s disappearance from San Diego after a highly publicized dispute with San Diego officials in 1923. The dispute concerned construction of the Barrett Dam. City officials discharged Savage from the project after “men who wanted to run things clashed with the engineer when he failed to bend his engineering opinion in their views.”<sup>15</sup> Savage spent the next several years traveling the world, performing engineering research for private parties. He visited over thirty foreign countries, including Italy, Egypt, the Sudan, Java, the Philippine Islands, China, and Japan, inspecting irrigation and hydroelectric projects and often reporting to President Calvin Coolidge on their technical requirements. In an attempt to find Savage and bring him back to San Diego, “cablegrams and messages raced around the world.” In 1928, they caught up with him in Paris. He agreed to return to his post as engineer “only on condition that he would be free from political interference.” Once Savage took “hold of the water helm,” projects like the Children’s Pool could begin to take shape.<sup>16</sup>

In May 1930, Scripps commissioned Savage to reexamine the project and to produce updated drawings, revised topographic and geological surveys, and a



In December 1930, Hiram Newton Savage sketched a more detailed site plan of the Children's Pool which included many of the project's final features. The plan shows walkways, vegetation and landscape elements, specifications for parking, lifeguard buoy shelter boxes, and plans for the breakwater's parapet walls. Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society.

new budget. Savage then expected the project to cost \$50,000 although he did not recommend any structural changes from the first surveys he conducted in 1923.<sup>17</sup> Still, Scripps was determined to finish the project. She even had several codicils inserted into her Last Will and Testament: "Plans have been prepared for developing the Pool near my home....if the work is not accomplished during my lifetime, I request...to go forward with it."<sup>18</sup>

Scripps retained architect William Templeton Johnson to design the breakwater's parapet walls and dressing stalls. Johnson was a nationally known architect who designed a number of buildings in San Diego, including the private Francis W. Parker School (1912), the La Jolla Public Library (1921), the Fine Arts Gallery (San Diego Museum of Art) (1927), San Diego Trust & Savings Bank (1928), the Junípero Serra Museum (1929), San Diego Natural History Museum (1932) and the United States Post Office on E Street (1932).<sup>19</sup> He favored the "smooth simple lines" of Mission Revival and Spanish Eclectic architecture. Not surprisingly, his proposed design for the Children's Pool was utilitarian, unobtrusive, and consistent with the organic principals found in the breakwater's design. His drawings, dated July 1930, show a horizontal, twenty-five foot, one-story structure that was perpendicular to the pool's two symmetrical stairwells. The dressing stalls, like the breakwater and steps, were made of reinforced concrete and set "below the level of the adjacent street [Coast Boulevard]."<sup>20</sup> It had a rectangular footprint, simple in form and shape. The project would not be Johnson's most stylized or ornamented work, but his input on its aesthetic elements was

indispensable to Savage.

Before completion of the updated survey, Savage had begun obtaining the necessary permits and authority for the work. On June 26, 1930, Johnson mailed applications and formal letters to San Diego's City Council, the Department of Public Works, the Board of Playground Commission, the Board of Park Commission, the U.S. War Department, and the State of California. The City of San Diego and the Department of Public Works jointly approved the project within four days of receipt of the letter through Resolution Number 54177. On July 11, 1930, J. B. Pendleton of the Playground Commission approved the project, and was "happy to cooperate in any and every way possible," including "during construction," and with "maintenance...after it is completed." The Park Commissioners sent Savage an approval letter on July 22, 1930, which showed their support for the project.<sup>21</sup>

The War Department and the State took the longest to sanction the project. Before the War Department would consider the breakwater, Savage had to meet with Major W. H. Lanagan, the district engineer for the U.S. War Department, in Los Angeles. At the meeting, Savage discussed the project goals, the need for the structure, aspects of its construction, and ownership rights. It went well and a month later, on July 22, 1930, William Templeton Johnson invited Colonel Bennett and Major Borden of the U.S. Engineer Office to review the drawings at the site. They were pleased with the design and the "Engineer Officers concluded and announced that provided the breakwater was constructed as designed, it would stay until *Kingdom Come*." Although the officers supported the project, they also planned to "hold the application in suspense" until the State approved the project. On August 30, 1930, Thomas M. Robins of the U.S. Engineer Office sent Scripps a formal letter telling her that his office would offer support under the following conditions: first, the Engineer Office reserved the right to suspend work at any point. Second, the project had to avoid injury to "the navigable channels or the banks of the waterway." The Engineer Office also reserved "full and free use of all navigable waterways adjacent to the project." Another condition gave the U.S. the authority to alter the position or to remove the structure at Scripps' expense "during future operations." They wanted the "permittee" to notify the office after the commencement of the work. Finally, if construction did not start before December 31, 1933, the permit would be "null and void."<sup>22</sup> Most of the letter's body came from the War Department's Standard Form Number 96, and was dependent on the State's decision.

On September 2, 1930, Savage finally received formal approval from the State. U.S. Attorney General Webb told Savage that although the project still needed an Act of Legislature, "no action would be taken by the State to prevent the progress of the work prior to...legislative action." Accordingly, Webb told Savage to "go forward with the project" without the Act, and he applauded the "public spirit and splendid ambition of Mrs. Scripps."<sup>23</sup> As Savage had anticipated in July 1930, construction of the breakwater would proceed without legislative authority.

On April 23, 1931, Gov. James Rolph, Jr. finally approved Senate Bill Number 422, *An Act Granting Certain Tide and Submerged Lands of the State of California to the City of San Diego*, which "officially" authorized the project.<sup>24</sup> The Senate Bill passed seven months after Savage received approval to begin construction from Webb.

Savage began seeking general contractors in September 1930 while awaiting

approval from the State. He sent an informal “invitation to bid” to four contractors who had “experience with this type of marine work”: Merritt-Chapman and Scott Corporation of San Pedro, Healy-Tibbitts Construction Company of San Francisco, W. M. Ledbetter and Company of Los Angeles, and Charles Steffgan of San Diego. Savage spent “considerable time” with representatives from each company. He chose the Ledbetter Company, who came in with the lowest bid of \$55, 215, despite the fact that they were “not heard from” when invited to meet in San Diego. The bids were due in Savage’s office on September 10 and he promised a decision on September 15, 1930. The Ledbetter Company previously constructed the Scripps Institution Pier at La Jolla Shores and a similar breakwater in Newport, California, “under very difficult [and similar] conditions” caused by the “adverse ocean currents.” Additionally, the company had erected “falsework causeways” and “concrete piles” for the Mission Bay Bridge in San Diego earlier that year.<sup>25</sup>

Ledbetter provided Savage with a multi-phased construction plan, and a detailed list of supplies and equipment. On September 16, 1930, Savage issued Ledbetter surety bonds worth \$50,000 and “labor and material man’s bonds” worth \$25,000, through the Indemnity Insurance Company.<sup>26</sup> After finalizing the contract, construction was finally ready.

### **“Through the Tides”: Construction and Difficulties**

On September 17, 1930, “after long discussions and investigations,” the way was “clear at last” to begin preliminary construction of the breakwater. Ledbetter



*View of La Jolla showing the Children's Pool under construction, ca. 1931. ©SDHS, #90:18138-444-*

organized a crew of “twelve men, including [a] carpenter, foreman Sam Neary, and superintendent Carl Gadesburg.” The crew brought equipment to the site and erected a “temporary building to house [an] office, blacksmith shop, and tools.” Ledbetter laid a water line and fenced off the site. The *La Jolla Journal* recorded the momentous day and excited the public over “this wonderful and valuable improvement.”<sup>27</sup>

The first phase of construction involved the assembly of a timber trestle used as a platform for the workers, construction of a cofferdam, assembly of a pile driver, excavation of a cutoff trench, and the drilling of holes for structural support rails. The workers constructed the trestle outward from the bluff and over the reef. It was the length of the proposed breakwater. After the trestle’s construction, the workers next assembled the pile driver. The pile driver was nearly twenty-feet high, and many La Jolla residents found themselves “bewildered by the complex and towering apparatus.” The crew drilled twenty-one piles into the bluff and began assembling a cofferdam to protect their work from the shifting sand and rough current. The cofferdam was a massive wooden structure composed of air and watertight timbers that sat below the workers’ trestle. On October 9, 1930, they lowered the cofferdam into place at the channel between the bluff and the reef. With the cofferdam and trestle assembled, the crew started excavation of a cutoff trench for the foundation, nicknamed “the Toe.”<sup>28</sup>

Savage recalled, “cutting the cutoff trench was the most interesting and important single thing about the entire project.” They placed the cutoff trench in an existing natural trench “previously out in the reef.” To assist the excavation of the trench, the workers used a fifty-horsepower centrifugal pump to remove the sand through suction. They created the Toe with a pile driver and a twenty-inch drill bit. “The bit pulverized the rock in the trench and the sea removed about half of the muck in the resulting trench.” The crew then used pneumatic spades to trim the jagged rocks left in the trench and to break up large boulders. Once the Toe’s depth reached ten feet and 328 feet long, the workers smoothed the surface with hand excavations. Then workers washed the trench clean and began drilling holes for the metal upright rails that would support the concrete.<sup>29</sup>

The digging of the trench took much longer than the anticipated seventy-five



*A panoramic view of the Children's Pool taken during its dedication to the children of La Jolla. Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society.*

days. Workers dug from October 16 to November 24, 1930. Consequently, the four weeks spent in the Toe was a setback to the schedule. The men lost several "hours through the tides," and drilling the holes for the upright rails could only occur at low tide. Due to the "capricious" ocean, water frequently filled the uprights' holes. Workers had to set wooden plugs wrapped in burlap sacks into the holes to protect them. The men had to drill 1,304.5 feet of holes and, when drilling slowed to a dismal sixty-two feet per eight-hour day, Savage tried to make up time through several measures. First, he had Ledbetter increase the size of the crew from twelve to sixteen men. During preparations for the trench, he had realized the proposed number would not be enough. He quickly learned that a sixteen-man crew was still insufficient for the trench and holes, and he had Ledbetter increase the crew to twenty-five men. To overcome the problems caused by the high tides, the twenty-five-person crew split into two teams and worked night shifts during low tide. Second, Savage ordered Ledbetter to begin laying the concrete and installing the upright railings while the crew simultaneously dug the trench and drilled the holes. The original plans had the concrete and railings installed after completion of the trench. Ledbetter ordered 3,125.5 barrels of Riverside Concrete, which arrived by railroad cars at Pacific Beach siding, and thirty-one tons of rail arrived from Los Angeles by the Shannahan Brothers Company.<sup>30</sup>

While washing the Toe in late October 1930, the crew placed temporary concrete bulkheads along the channels of the reef to prevent water from reaching the cofferdam. Then they started laying concrete and installed the railings in "section one and two" of the trench (up to the opening of the sluiceways) and finished the two sections before completion of the trench. The workers would construct the breakwater in eight sections, and maintaining steady progress was crucial to the project. By early December, the workers were ready for the next phase of construction, which involved concreting the rest of the breakwater and inserting the railings into the upright holes.

On December 8, 1930, the crew finished concreting and inserting railings in all of section three, and started the foundation work for section four and five. At this point, they were fifty-two percent finished with the concretion. However, "heavy ground swells" and rough seas temporarily stopped their work in late December 1930. On December 11, the "newly poured concrete of section four was badly washed and the inside step forms were demolished, also the outside curved form for section three were demolished." On December 16, "the lower portions of steps of section four were damaged." The workers had to "cut away to a uniform level" and pour a new top to the damaged steps. Water seeped under two of concrete panels on December 23, which ruined the freshly poured concrete. After these events, Ledbetter requested "an extension of time of completion" until January 29, 1931. They expected to finish the breakwater two months later than the date they originally planned.<sup>31</sup>

The difficulty in creating the breakwater caused further deviations from the original plan. Scripps decided to eliminate the dressing stalls after consulting with both Savage and her lawyer. But she continued to employ architect Johnson to advise Savage and Ledbetter on the overall visual quality of the project. He would also design the stairway structure and parapet walls.<sup>32</sup>

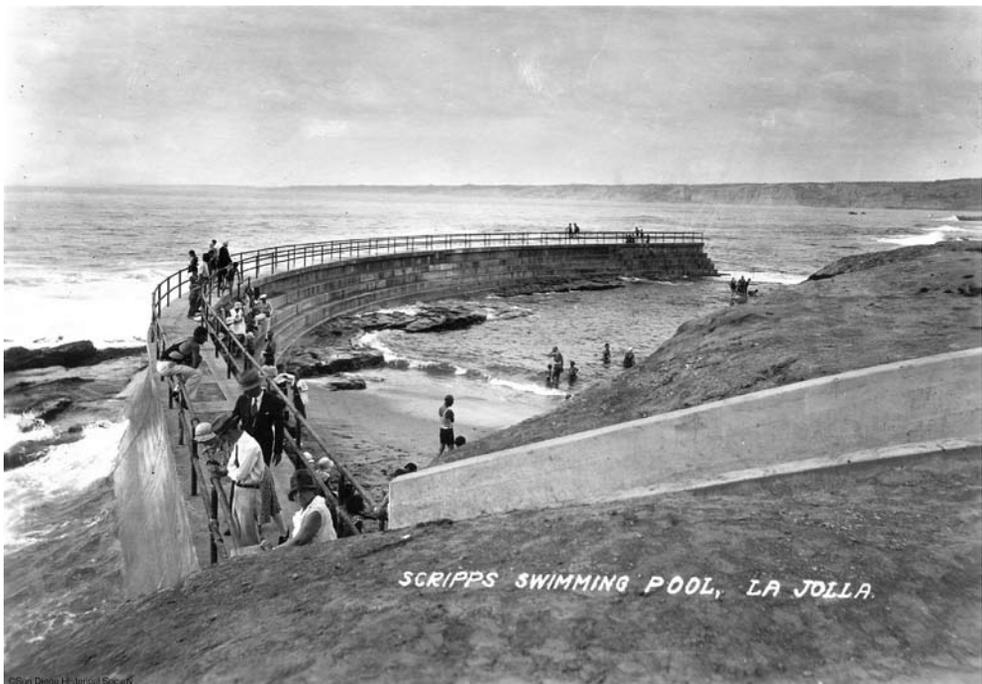
On December 24, 1930, the workers finally finished installing and grouting the upright railings and the concretion of the eight sections. In addition, they

completed the four sluiceway holes and were ready to start building the grillages and gates for them. The breakwater began taking shape, and Savage, Ledbetter, and the crew became excited over the promise of the next phase.

The New Year began with the disassembly of the trestle. Workers started the excavation of the stairway structure. Additionally, the crew took advantage of favorable low tides by removing the remaining large boulders that lined the pool's bottom. The site also had two small caves along the south beach and two caves entering into the bluff from the pool side. Phase III of construction required the workers to concrete and seal the caves "to protect the adjacent structures." They used Riverside reinforced concrete and built three eighteen-inch steps into the face of the south beach caves "to facilitate access" to the sand.<sup>33</sup> Once again, Savage had the workers use the site's natural features to enhance the functionality of the breakwater. The use of the concreted caves as small access steps reflected the organic ideas that dominated the plan and design.

As the project seemed to be gaining speed, a significant setback disrupted work for several days on January 2, 1931. The dragline, used to remove the large boulders, fell while being moved into position. It "went off the bluff and landed on its side on the south beach opposite [the] caves." Ledbetter replaced the dragline with a "larger Northwest shovel," and actually used it to salvage the "old dragline." Work did not resume for several days, and Savage's crew felt they "fell short of accomplishment due to...the accident to the dragline."<sup>34</sup>

On January 13, 1931, Johnson and Savage submitted to Scripps several design modifications to the parapet walls. After they poured the breakwater's walls, the men decided to "change the height and taper the top elevation."<sup>35</sup> Johnson and Savage wanted the parapet walls to be eight inches high on either side. They



Visitors walking along the breakwater, 1930s. ©SDHS #OP 6069.

suggested the change purely for aesthetic value, to accentuate the smooth lines of the breakwater.

By January 19, the workers finished the concretion of the caves and the excavation of the stairway structure. The blacksmith continued assembling the grillages for the sluiceways. During this time, they poured ten feet of concrete for the stairway structure and retaining wall. Still, the workers were quite far from their projected completion date. On January 28, Ledbetter asked Scripps for another extension of time, believing it was "was impossible to complete the work within the allocated time." Scripps agreed and granted Ledbetter another extension until March 15, 1931.<sup>36</sup> With the time extension, the workers prepared themselves for the final phase, which involved grouting the walkway's railings, completing the stairway and steps, finishing the parapet walls, and preparing the site for public use.

### **"Beautiful, Beautiful Lines"**

Phase IV of construction was the culmination of a project that began nearly a decade earlier. Work on the last phase commenced the first week of February 1931. The workers began grouting the parallel railings on top of the breakwater and completed them shortly before February 19. After their installation, crewmembers cleaned and painted the railings with two coats of "Hermastic paint." Next, Ledbetter's men completed the stairway structure. They built the stairway structure to an elevation of twenty-eight and one-quarter feet, and concreted the lower landings and steps.<sup>37</sup> The following week, the crew finished concreting the eight-inch east and west parapet walls. The only construction work left was the paving and curbing of the parking lot adjacent to Coast Blvd.

After the completion of construction in early March 1931, Savage invited representatives of Scripps to the breakwater to examine the structure. On March 4, the representatives met with Johnson at the site and offered some criticism. They felt the lines in the terrace area were distracting and they criticized the "angularity" of the stairway structure. Additionally, they recommended reducing the height of the parapet walls further and creating an additional step and extending the railing at the first section of the breakwater. The purpose of the step and railing were to provide an easier way for "nurses and those in charge of small children...to get from the walkway" to the "sunny steps."<sup>38</sup>

Following the meeting, Johnson and Savage began making changes. To fix the distracting lines, Johnson suggested coloring the breakwater's walls. He told Scripps' representatives "he would be glad to get in touch with a man in Los Angeles who is able to tint the concrete walls." Tinting the walls would give it the same appearance as the surrounding soil's color and would "relieve the stark appearance of this section." This would also enhance the organic design of the structure. On March 25, Johnson had Arthur Raitt of Lamens Process Company color the walls, which created a natural algae visual effect and "beautiful, beautiful lines."<sup>39</sup>

To relieve the "angularity" of the stairway structure, Savage and Johnson added a balustrade along the upper portion of the first flight of stairs. It was a practical addition, since it aided "elderly people" in accessing the beach from the street. Work on reducing the parapet walls several inches began on March 12 and the



La Jolla residents sat on the grass in front of the Casa de Mañana for the May 31, 1931, dedication and ceremonial opening of the Children's Pool. Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society.

workers finished before April 4. Design alterations caused the project to go over deadline and over budget by approximately \$4,000. However, the cosmetic changes clearly added to the visual appeal and safety of the breakwater.<sup>40</sup>

Outside of these slight modifications, Savage encountered only one obstacle during the final phase of construction. He noticed that the sand level of the pool constantly fluctuated with the ebb and flow of the tide. "A strong suction pull caused by the water running into the sluiceways and then receding" made it difficult for the pool to have an even sandbar. To remedy this problem, he decided



Children and adults enjoying a summer day at the Children's Pool in the 1930s. Courtesy of the La Jolla Historical Society.

to close the four wooden grillages. This prevented the sand in the pool from moving west through the sluiceways. On March 27, workers sealed the grillages. The pool's floor immediately lowered one and a half feet. Three days later, a sand beach formed at "the corner between the bluff and the inside of the breakwater,"

which Savage saw as beneficial “for children bathing in the pool.” If it ever seemed desirable to reopen the gates, Savage proposed hand excavating the sluiceways at low tide and raising the frames and gates at low tide. After dealing with these obstacles, work was finally finished on the Children’s Pool and it was ready for the public’s use.<sup>41</sup>

### “A Wonderful Improvement”

After extensive planning, a tedious permit/approval process, and construction filled with numerous delays and obstacles, Savage, Johnson, and Ledbetter eventually completed the Children’s Pool on April 4, 1931. From the initial survey and design to the final work done by the contractor, the entire project took ten years.

On May 31, a celebration occurred at the breakwater to celebrate the accomplishment. Scripps was too ill to attend the celebration but Savage spoke in her place, reminding the audience of the difficulties involved in constructing the structure and the importance of the breakwater to the people of La Jolla. The ceremony featured speeches, a pantomime performance by La Jolla school children, and a concert by the San Diego Y.M.C.A. band.

The breakwater received tremendous support from members of the community. Judge John Kean described the project as “the most valuable of all Miss Scripps’ benefits to La Jolla.” Samuel Fox, representative to Mayor Walter Austin, believed that the breakwater would allow children “to enjoy without danger, the Ocean.” The community’s weekly paper, *La Jolla Journal*, called the idea a “wonderful and valuable improvement,” and “a great asset to the community.”<sup>42</sup>

The breakwater reflects the philanthropic legacy of Scripps and the dedication and work ethic of Savage. Its construction was an intensive undertaking that created a safer bathing area for children. It remains a durable and lasting structure on La Jolla’s coast.

## NOTES

1. The author thanks Dr. Molly McClain and the La Jolla Historical Society for their research assistance. “Work on Children’s Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started,” *La Jolla Journal*, September 18, 1930, 1.
2. Terry Rodgers, “Is Their Fate Sealed?” *San Diego Union Tribune*, October 22, 2005. In past years, seals came to the Children’s Pool to birth and nurse pups between February and March. Recently, the number of seals has increased and inhabited the beach for longer periods of time. Environmental advocacy groups like the San Diego Sierra Club opposed the removal of the seals from the beach. For more information, see Kristina Hancock, “Turf Wars: The Seals of La Jolla, Public Trust Land and Animal Law,” *San Diego Lawyer* (March/April 2006): 22-29; Hany Elwany, Reinhard Flick, Jean Nichols, and Anne-Lise Lindquist, “La Jolla Children’s Pool: Beach Management and Water Quality Improvement Project,” August 27, 1998, Scripps Institution of Oceanography Technical Report, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/sio/techreport/20/> (accessed March 26, 2006).
3. Jeff Galyardt, letter to the editor, “Seals, Not Humans, Invaded the Children’s Pool,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 1, 2006; Alicia Booth, letter to the editor, “...And An Awful Stench,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 2, 2006; Rebecca Stanger, letter to the editor, “Pool is for Seals, Not Bratty Adults,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, December 8, 2005.
4. Rodgers, “City Council to Appeal Children’s Pool Ruling,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 28, 2005; Rodgers, “Children’s Pool Ruling is Delayed,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, November 9, 2005;

Rodgers, "Is Their Fate Sealed?"; Rodgers, "Rope Barrier is Sought for Seals at Children's Pool," *San Diego Union Tribune*, January 25, 2006.

5. *San Diego Union*, February 3, 1875, April 15, 1881, 1; "Young Woman's Presence of Mind Saves Her Life," *La Jolla Journal*, June 18, 1920, 1.

6. "Work on Children's Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started," 1; "Children's Pool Given to the City," *La Jolla Journal*, 4 June 1931, 1. For more information on Ellen Browning Scripps, see Patricia A. Schaelchlin, *The Newspaper Barons: A Biography of the Scripps Family* (Carlsbad: Kales Press, 2003); Abraham J. Shragge and Kay Dietze, "Character, Vision and Creativity: The Extraordinary Confluence of Forces that Gave Rise to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography," *The Journal of San Diego History* (JSDH) 49, no. 2 (2003): 71-86; Bruce Kamerling, "How Ellen Browning Scripps Brought Ancient Egypt to San Diego," *JSDH* 38, no. 2 (1992); Bruce Kamerling, "Anna and Albert Valentien: The Arts and Crafts Movement in San Diego," *JSDH* 24, no. 3 (1978): 343-366; Frances Parnell (Keating) Hepner, *Ellen Browning Scripps: Her Life and Times* (San Diego: Friends of the Library, San Diego State College, 1966); Albert Britt, *Ellen Browning Scripps: Journalist and Idealist* (Oxford: Printed for Scripps College at the University Press, 1960); Edward Dessau Clarkson, *Ellen Browning Scripps: A Biography* (La Jolla: private printing, 1958); Robert J. Bernard, "Ellen Browning Scripps, Woman of Vision," *Scripps College Bulletin* 34, no. 1 (1959); Carl H. Heilbron, ed., *History of San Diego County* (San Diego: San Diego Press Club, 1936).

7. "Children's Pool Given to the City," 1.

8. Fletcher wrote about Savage in his memoir, noting that "he entered into my life, touching on so many important problems, in opposition so many times, I could not write my memoirs with any degree of accuracy without bringing him into the picture." Savage had the backing of Melville Klauber, for many years President and Chairman of the Water Committee of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, and Harry Jones, manager of Byllesby Company, which owned San Diego Gas & Electric Company. He also had the backing of the Spreckels interests. According to Fletcher, "it was that backing that brought Savage to San Diego as San Diego's Hydraulic Engineer." He wrote, "Savage was the most expensive hydraulic engineer San Diego ever had. Savage had a coterie of friends backing him up. He was a big, husky chap who scarcely ever smiled and, when you doubted his judgment and tried to argue, Savage sulked." Ed Fletcher, *Memoirs of Ed Fletcher* (San Diego: private printing, 1952), 389; Henry Love, "H. N. Savage, City Dam Builder, Dies on Duty in San Diego Service," *San Diego Union*, June 25, 1934, 1.

9. Savage served as consulting engineer to the Southern California Mountain Water Company in connection to the Morena, Upper Otay, and Lower Otay Dams (1895). He also worked with the San Diego and Cuyamaca Railway Company, the Coronado Beach Railway Company, the San Diego and La Jolla Railway Company, and the Cuyamaca Water Company (1898-1903). A multi-volume set of papers collected by Savage documents the history of construction of dams at Barrett, El Capitan, Lower Otay, Morena Reservoir and the San Dieguito Project. It is available for consultation in the California Room of the San Diego Public Library and in the Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley. Mary Allely, "Local History Materials in the California Room of the San Diego Public Library," *JSDH* 37, no. 3 (1991): 224-225; "Finding Aid to the Hiram Newton Savage Photographs, 1905-1933," Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt6m3nc11c> (accessed March 26, 2006).

10. Hiram Newton Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool for Children at La Jolla, California: Feature History, March 1931* (San Diego, 1931), 7. Savage included copies of letters, plans, estimates, and other materials in this bound typescript, located at the La Jolla Historical Society. Another copy of this document can be found in the Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley. The archive also contains nearly fifty photographs of the Children's Pool, WRCA MS 76/16, box 4, folders 80-81.

11. Hiram Newton Savage to Ellen Browning Scripps, September 15, 1930, La Jolla Historical Society (LJHS); "Children's Pool Given to the City."

12. "Work on Children's Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started," 1; Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 5-6, 8, 196.

13. *Ibid.*, 5-6, 202.

14. *Ibid.*, 6; "Scripps Bathing Pool for Children at La Jolla," June 15, 1931, Children's Pool File, LJHS.

15. Love, "H. N. Savage, City Dam Builder, Dies on Duty in San Diego Service," 1.

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16. "Finding Aid to the Hiram Newton Savage Photographs, 1905-1933," Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt6m3nc11c> (accessed March 26, 2006). "Children's Pool Given to the City," 1; Love, "H. N. Savage," 1, 3.
17. Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 7, 11.
18. Curtis Hillyer and J.C. Harper, *Last Will and Testament of Ellen Browning Scripps* (San Diego: privately printed, 21 October 1922 to 11 August 1932), 30-31, 80, 84-85. Scripps' legal team added and revised three codicils in April 1924, April 1930, and December 1930.
19. See Sarah J. Shaffer, "A Civic Architect for San Diego: The Work of William Templeton Johnson," *JSDH* 45, no. 3 (1999): 166-187; Martin E. Petersen, "William Templeton Johnson: San Diego Architect, 1877-1957," *JSDH* 17, no. 4 (1971): 21-30; Gregg R. Hennessey, "Creating a Monument, Re-Creating History: Junipero Serra Museum and Presidio Park," *JSDH* 45, no. 3 (1999): 137-160. See also the interactive CD-Rom produced by the San Diego Historical Society entitled "From Blueprints to Buildings: San Diego Architecture."
20. "W. T. Johnson Dies, Noted Architect," *San Diego Union*, October 15, 1957, 2-3; Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 9, 199; *San Diego Evening Tribune*, September 13, 1930, 1.
21. Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 9, 11-18.
22. *Ibid.*, 20-21, 64, 66, 72.
23. *Ibid.*, 23, 77.
24. *Ibid.*, 26.
25. *Ibid.*, 27-28, 33-34, 77; "Work on Children's Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started"; Charles Steffgen came in at \$57,749.70. Merritt-Chapman and Scott came in at \$79,877.80. Healy-Tibbitts made an offer to "furnish equipment and do work at cost plus fifteen percent."
26. "Breakwater in La Jolla," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, September 13, 1930, 1.
27. "Work on Children's Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started," *La Jolla Journal*, September 18, 1930, 1; Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 78.
28. "False Work Built at Bathing Pool," *La Jolla Journal*, October 2, 1930, 1; Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 42, 81; "Drilling the 'Toe' at Bathing Pool," *La Jolla Journal*, November 13, 1930, 1.
29. Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 45-46.
30. "Old Ocean Favors Pool Improvement," *La Jolla Journal*, 30 October 1930, 1; Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 30, 46-47, 82-83.
31. Savage, *Ellen Browning Scripps Bathing Pool*, 52, 82-83, 87, 131, 137.
32. *Ibid.*, 88, 129.
33. *Ibid.*, 54-55, 93.
34. *Ibid.*, 93.
35. *Ibid.*, 129.
36. *Ibid.*, 131-133.
37. *Ibid.*, 98, 131.
38. *Ibid.*, 100, 124-125.
39. *Ibid.*, 104, 124-125.
40. *Ibid.*, 105, 124.
41. *Ibid.*, 116-119.
42. "Children's Pool Given to the City," 1; "Work on Children's Swimming Bathing Pool in La Jolla Started," 1.