



The Del Mar Historical Society



Newsletter

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FOND MEMORIES OF FAIR DAYS NOW LONG GONE BY



By Don Terwilliger

In October, 1936, I attended the first San Diego County Fair featuring agricultural exhibits in large tents and a few simple amusements on the present site. With the exception of the World War II period when it was closed, the Fair has grown each year to become a major county event. For 29 years, my father was fairgrounds superintendent, so my family was very much involved in the summer time event. Mother was a fair hostess in authentic Spanish costume matching the fair's Spanish-Mexican heritage theme in the 1940s and 50s.

The big show was called "Fiestacade" with Leo Carillo as master of ceremonies. Xavier Cugat's orchestra, the Tipica Band from Mexico City, and several specialty acts. I regularly worked there between 1946 and 1974, hauling programs to the gates and exhibit halls, selling ginger beer, and being an official VIP escort. My last eight years were the most fun, manning the fair's information booth sponsored by the San Diego Union newspaper.

I made my fair debut at age 15 in a dance program organized by the La Vielle Studio de Dance, a Del Mar school to which my mother had sent me "to get some culture and social graces. That same year, I worked in a fair office sorting exhibit entry forms and doing one-finger typing.

At one of the early fairs, I won two baby ducks in a game long banished by the Humane Society—tossing lightweight rings around the unfortunate bird's necks. My prizes fared better thereafter, wandering freely around my home near the beach, to the annoyance of neighbors. And when they were fully grown, they won first and second prizes in the fair's poultry show, in a year when mine were the only duck entries.

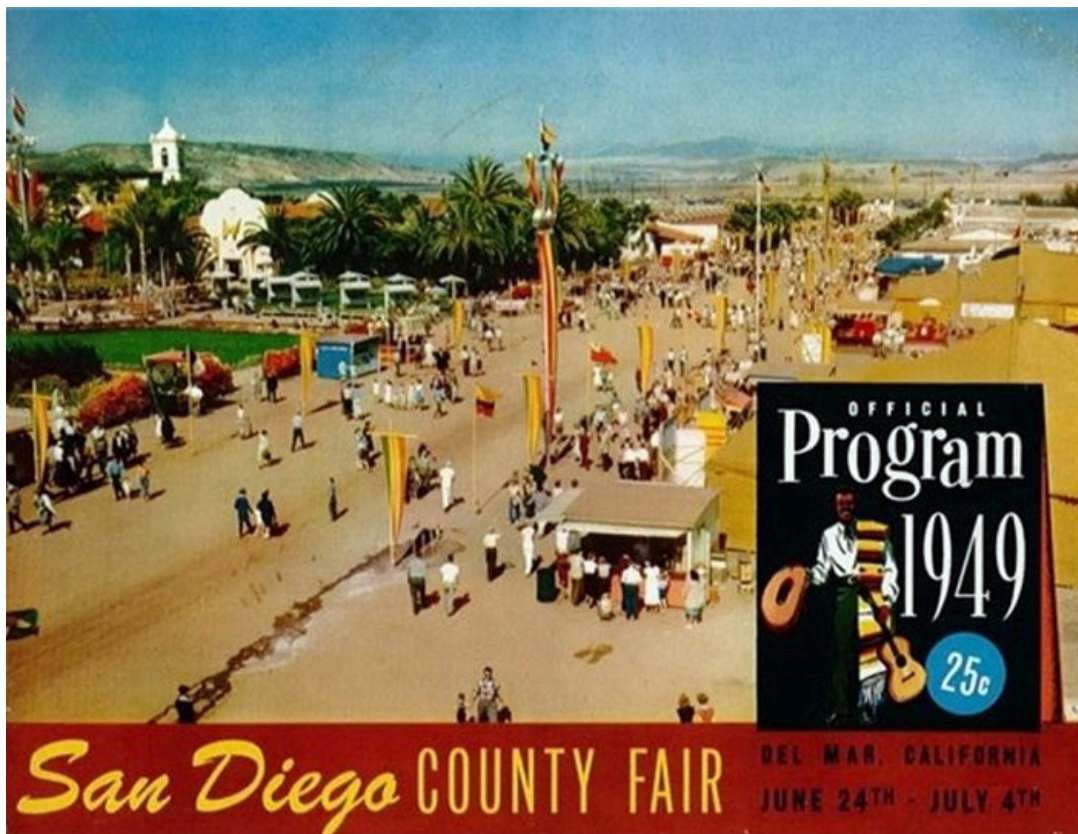
In 1947 Tommy Hernandez first played the role of Don Diego, the fair's symbol of hospitality and goodwill. This wonderful and memorable person was my friend for 37 years until he died in 1984. With Tommy's arrival, another fair tradition was begun the title of "Fairest of the Fair" given each year to a local beauty queen from one of the cities in San Diego County. At earlier fairs a "Queen of the Fair" was named from those who applied. Among the first "Fairest" title holders was Marla English, who later became a movie actress under contract with Paramount Studios, and Raquel Welch.



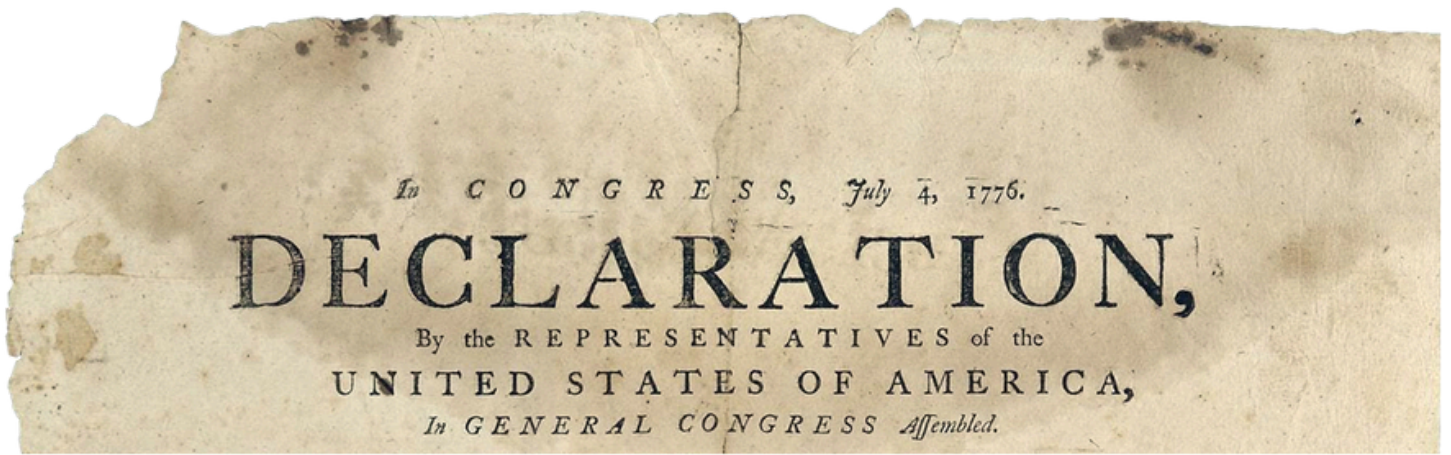
In 1958 I had dinner with Raquel and Tommy at Del Mar's Namara Inn, now named the Stratford Inn, a date she "could not remember" when I spoke with her after she became famous.

In the late spring of 1952, I performed in a touring show, "County Fair Previews," that for 12 weeks visited towns in San Diego County to promote the fair with a free two-hour variety program, including a tap dance by yours truly, plus local singers Ruth Ann Hunt and Bill Apple accompanied by the Don Diegan orchestra. Wow! Women who attended the show were invited to participate in the Gunny Sack Vogue Contest," designing and wearing original creations made from burlap, a tradition that was short-lived.

The principal purpose of the “Previews’ was to spotlight each town’s entry into the “Fairest of the Fair competition. And young ladies between the ages of 4 and 10 had the chance to enter the national “Miss Sunbeam Contest,” the grand prize for which was a trip for two to Paris, France. The winners were judged by how closely they resembled a picture of an ideal blond child printed on the wrappers of America’s favorite, Sunbeam bread, which certainly limited the entries.



California’s county fairs were originally designed to showcase the state’s agricultural riches and Del Mar, in the 22nd Agricultural District, had some of the finest produce displays anywhere. Fair visitors were as genuinely interested in seeing what was grown in our lovely county’s fields and orchards as today’s crowds studying the latest kitchen gadgets, hot tubs and carpet cleaners. With much of San Diego’s rich agricultural land turned into freeways, shopping centers and endless housing tracts, our former earthly paradise has been lost forever. They call it progress.



The Del Mar Foundation

and

The Del Mar Historical Society

Present a Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the United States

This will be a FREE program of patriotic and Great American Songbook music



*Officially, the Continental Congress declared its freedom from Great Britain on **July 2, 1776**, when it voted to approve a resolution submitted by delegate Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, declaring “That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”*

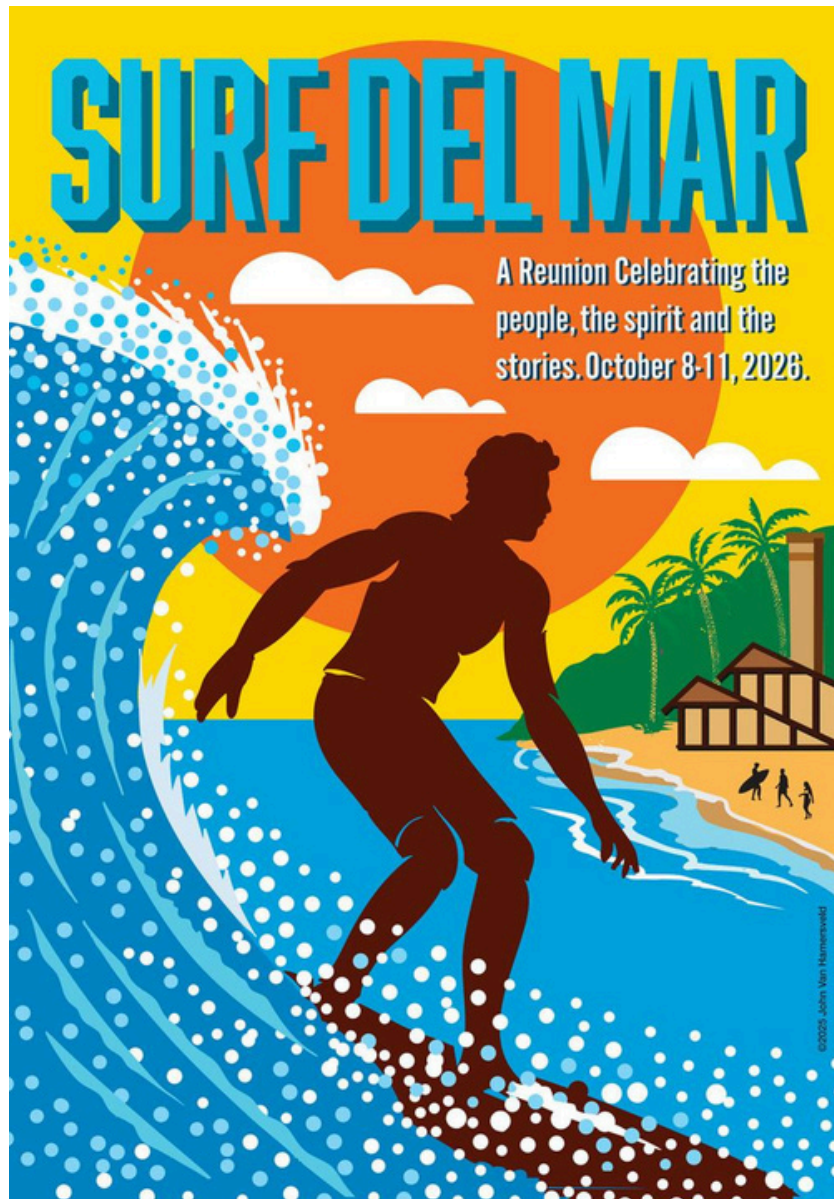
John Adams thought July 2 would be marked as a national holiday for generations to come. Adams wrote “[Independence Day] will be the most memorable epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade with shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.”

*After voting on independence on July 2, the Continental Congress then needed to draft a document explaining the move to the public. It had been proposed in draft form by the Committee of Five and it took two days for the Congress to agree on the edits. Once the Congress approved the actual Declaration of Independence document on **July 4, 1776**, it ordered that it be sent to a printer named John Dunlap. About 200 copies of the “Dunlap Broadside” version of the document were printed, with John Hancock’s name printed at the bottom. Today, 26 copies remain.*

SAVE THE DATES

OCTOBER 8 - 11, 2026

THE DEL MAR HISTORICAL
SOCIETY PRESENTS



Faces of the Festival

Some of the interesting people you'll meet at different events at the Surf Del Mar Festival



Peter Sprague, Musician



Kevin Anderson, Artist



Todd Glaser, Photographer and Author



Jim Lischer, Former Lifeguard and Filmmaker



Jeff Lehmann, TV Host and Producer



Shaun Tomson, Champion Surfer and Author



Chris Ahrens, Author



Jeff Divine, Surf Photographer



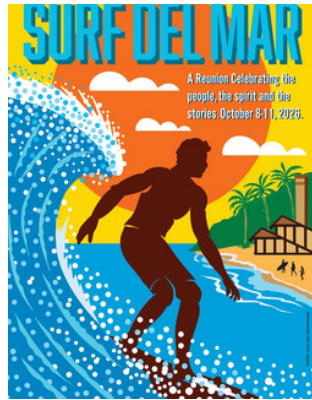
Sarah O'Connor, Artist



SURF DEL MAR FESTIVAL MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

We're proud to offer posters and T-shirts featuring our iconic design created by the legendary artist John Van Hamersveld. The posters come in two sizes and are signed and numbered, making them special collector's items that will grow in value over the years.

POSTERS



13" x 19"

\$75.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling

18" x 24"

\$125.00, plus \$7.00 shipping and handling

T-Shirts

T-Shirts are a beautiful shade of Sky Blue that matches the colors in the poster. They come in sizes M, L, XL and 2XL. \$25.00 each, Plus \$5.00 shipping and Handling

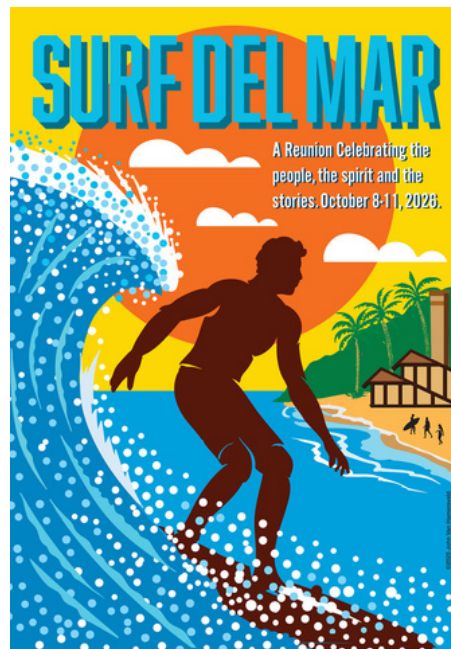


To order posters or T-Shirts, contact James Gooding at: jamesgooding524@gmail.com

CALLING ALL DEL MAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS

We are eagerly looking for volunteers, and people who want to get more involved in the Del Mar Historical Society's activities. Because you're a member, you care about our community and its rich and unique history. Please join us at our monthly meetings at the Community Connections Building, 225 9th Street, every second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 PM. Learn about our many new and ongoing projects—projects that are just waiting for people like you to be a part of!

Help us plan our quarterly membership nights where we showcase authors and members of the community who have wonderful stories to tell. Help with our Oral Histories Program; be a tour guide for History Walks around the village. Sign up to be a docent at the Alvarado House. Bring your own ideas for how the Historical Society can have an even greater impact on our community.



RIGHT NOW, WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO HELP WITH ALL THE EVENTS FOR THE SURF DEL MAR FESTIVAL. What are you most interested in? The Book Fair? The Climate Symposium? The Art Walk? The Film Festival? The Reunion Day at Powerhouse Park? The Opening Night Celebration at the Plaza? We need you to be a part of it all! Email Susie Stevenson at: goodstevenson@yahoo.com if you want to get involved in this exciting celebration: October 8-11, 2026!