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Descriptive Summary

Title

Laguna Greenbelt Oral History Project

Date

1984, 1985, 1988.

Creator

Joanna Brand

Extent

Six (6) oral histories

Repository

Center for Oral and Public History
California State University, Fullerton

Project Abstract

This project is a compilation of oral histories from men and women, residents of Orange County, CA, with knowledge concerning a parcel of local land, called the Laguna Greenbelt. The oral histories were part of a community history project conducted by Joanna Brand, whose husband, Jon S. Brand, was not only the mayor of Laguna Beach, but also an advocate for the Laguna Greenbelt.

Laguna Beach resident and bookstore owner, Jim Dilley (b. 1912 - 1980) formed the Laguna Greenbelt Incorporated (LGI) in 1968. After spending time in England, Dilley was inspired by the open spaces and envisioned such a preserved area, near Laguna Beach. The six narrators are members of LGI, as well as acquaintances and friends of Jim Dilley. They share his dream for this preserved open-space and fought on his behalf against encroachment and development. The prospective greenbelt borders the City of Laguna Beach and included areas known as Sycamore Hills, Aliso Canyon, Wood Canyon, El Toro Canyon, Morro Canyon and Laguna Canyon – encompassing 17,000 acres.

The narrators cover a broad spectrum of those involved in the greenbelt, from the grassroots activists to ecological experts to government officials. The organization experienced setbacks, such as the construction of the 73 toll road, but many victories as well. Of notable mention is the adoption of land dedication in exchange for development – a precedent set in Orange County that continues to influence surrounding counties. In sum, the narrators demonstrate commendable activism and dedication, inspired by both the beauty of the greenbelt lands and also the visionary, Jim Dilley.

Laguna Greenbelt Oral History Project Abstracts

OH 1797

Narrator	Carl Johnson (b.1921 – 1996)
Interviewer	Joanna Brand
Date	October 13, 1984
Language	English
Project	Laguna Greenbelt
Audio Format(s)	Reel to Reel; Digital Recording
Length	1 hour
Transcript	Edited Transcript (29 pp)
Collateral	Brief internet clipping on Laguna Greenbelt history.

Abstract

An oral history with Carl Johnson, a resident of Laguna Beach, CA. This interview was conducted as part of a community history project. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about the Laguna Greenbelt, a community improvement association. Specifically, this interview covers the organization's formation and the work of Jim Dilley and his Citizen's Town Planning Association; Dilley's convincing and the subsequent formation of 'Citizens for the Greenbelt' (aka Laguna Greenbelt, Inc.) and Johnson joining its Board; initial meeting with County Supervisor Ron Caspers; Dilley and the boundaries of the Greenbelt on a map; Johnson's appointments to the Planning Commission and Laguna City Council in 1972, and as President of the Greenbelt in 1980; rivalry with fellow Greenbelt member Tom Alexander; election of Johnson's predecessor Jon Brand; the effort to stop further land development into Laguna by Rancho Palos Verdes Corporation; Johnson's protest against a motion to sue the City and his resignation from the Board; Sycamore Hills as the geographic keystone of the Laguna Greenbelt; early strategies to stop development, which culminated in the city of Laguna purchasing the Greenbelt land; the Williamson Act; land acquisition via developer dedication; negotiations with The Irvine Company; how it takes money to achieve goals; income levels of the Greenbelt; threat of freeways to Greenbelt lands; development threat and legal wrangling of Sycamore Hills; the threats to and future goals of the Greenbelt; the legacy of Jim Dilley.

OH 1798

Narrator Barbara Stuart (b. 1916 - 1998)

Interviewer Joanna Brand

Date November 11, 1984

Language English

Project Laguna Greenbelt

Audio Format(s) Reel to reel

Length

Transcript Edited Transcript (10 pp)

Collateral *Los Angeles Times* clipping: "Open Space Dreams Have Taken Root, Borne Fruit." By David Reyes, June 14, 1999.

Abstract

An oral history with Barbara Stuart, a resident of Laguna Beach, CA and a member of Laguna Greenbelt, Inc., a community organization formed in order to fight development and preserve precious lands surrounding Laguna Beach. This interview was conducted as part of a community history project. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Jim Dilley, the founder and driving force behind the Laguna Greenbelt, Inc. Specifically the narrator recalls Dilley as a visionary; his migration to Laguna and being the proprietor of a book store; the narrator's first encounter with Dilley in 1968; Dilley forming the Citizens Town Planning Association, from which his passion for the Greenbelt grew; Dilley's gift with words; Dilley's talents as a musician, scholar, minister, and avid learner; early meetings of the Laguna Greenbelt in Stuart's home; Orange County's acceptance of the Greenbelt thanks to Jim's pervasiveness; Dilley's role in the vestry at Saint Mary's Episcopal Church and Greenbelt Sunday; highs and lows of Greenbelt support; the sustained effort required for the Greenbelt; the development and challenge from the San Joaquin Hills Corridor; articles written about Dilley before he died in 1980 and the hope that his vision will be achieved.

OH 1799

Narrator Jon S. Brand

Interviewer Joanna Brand

Date April 1, 1985

Language English
Project Laguna Greenbelt
Audio Format(s) Reel to Reel; Digital Recording.

Length

Transcript Edited Transcript (17 pp)

Collateral None

Abstract

An oral history with Jon S. Brand, a geographer and resident of Laguna Beach, CA. This interview was conducted for a community history project and to gather geographic information about the lands of the Laguna Beach Greenbelt. Specifically, the narrator speaks about the geography and history of Laguna Beach; early Spanish colonists and landholding system; Irvine Ranch and Moulton Ranch boundaries; Laguna Beach community pride and support behind the Greenbelt; geographic and biological makeup of the Greenbelt area (AKA San Joaquin Hills); the three “lagunas” (lakes) of Laguna Canyon; El Toro Canyon and its flora and fauna; the northern boundary of Muddy Canyon, near Crystal Cove State Park; The Irvine Company housing developments in the canyons; Supervisor Riley’s compromise w/ The Irvine Company to build homes, in exchange for preservation of Laguna Greenbelt lands; the geographical makeup of Emerald Canyon and other areas within Laguna Beach, such as Boat Canyon and Wood(s) Canyon – both to the south; The Aliso Viejo Company and its encroachment onto Greenbelt lands, its controversial building of tract homes and city incorporation in the late 1970s; a prospective park in Moulton Meadows and the inertia in getting land approval from Orange County; a prospective nature study center and help of environmental lobbyist Dennis Carpenter; the director of State Park System under Governor Jerry Brown, Peter Dangermond’s verbal approval of State incorporation of the land, but resulted in no action; possible help from the Coastal Conservancy; the second unit of the Greenbelt: an area called Sycamore Hills; the future threats to the Greenbelt, particularly the San Joaquin Hills Corridor (toll road freeway); Supervisor Riley’s support of San Joaquin Hills Corridor for his 1984 election platform; on the contrary, Riley also a support for open space preservation; the high traffic volume and environmental impact of the San Joaquin Hills Corridor; Orange County challenges to finance transportation and 1984’s CA Proposition A; opposition to Prop A: formation of Orange County Tomorrow, of which Brand was part; Brand’s early years in teaching at Orange Coast College and his arrival in Laguna Beach in 1965; Brand’s political forays and his election as mayor of Laguna Beach in 1977; his activity in the Laguna Greenbelt Association; the people of Laguna Beach being provincial, and the widespread concern for preservation; the continual thrive of the Laguna Greenbelt Association; the legacy of founder Jim Dilley, and the ongoing battle to preserve.

OH 1801

Narrator Frederick Lang (b. 1915 – 1996)

Interviewer Joanna Brand

Date April 4, 1985

Language English

Project Laguna Greenbelt

Audio Format(s) Reel to Reel; Digital Recording.

Length 1 hour, 9 minutes.

Transcript Edited Transcript (14 pp)

Collateral Letter from Lang to interviewee w/ clarifications.

Abstract

An oral history with Fred Lang, a resident of Laguna Beach, CA. This interview was conducted as part of a community history project. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about the flora within the proposed area of the Laguna Beach Greenbelt. Specifically, the narrator elaborates on the variety of plant life within this area; the “lakes” (vernal pools) of Laguna Canyon; the water hyacinth plant; the chaparral shrub; various colors of the toyon and sumac plants; chamise plant; sage salvia plant; Artemesia plant; sagebrush; wild flowers such as wild onion, blue-eyed grass, the golden yarrow, shooting star, indian paint brush and four o’clock; Lang being influenced by local gardner and Englishman Theodore Payne; his correspondence with California plant expert, Harry Butterfield; Lang’s own home built in Bluebird Canyon (Laguna Beach) and his eucalyptus trees; the plants along Laguna Canyon Road; sycamore trees as the center of the Greenbelt; unique and endangered plants of the Greenbelt, such as wild white lilac; scrub oak plants; wild artichokes; early Spanish influence and their plants; Italian banker Franceschi and the plants he brought to the area, such as the bouganvilla; Huntington family’s introduction of the palm tree; Charlie Snyder and his garden on Diamond Street; the various temperatures in Laguna; mustard seed; Billy Bond’s destruction of the olive grove in nearby Aliso Canyon; and Lang’s reflections on Laguna Greenbelt Association founder Jim Dilley.

OH 2060

Narrator Thomas F. Riley, Orange County Supervisor, 5th District. (b. 1912 – 1998)

Interviewer Joanna Brand

Date	August 4, 1988
Language	English
Project	Laguna Greenbelt
Audio Format(s)	Digital Recording
Length	53 minutes
Transcript	Edited Transcript (21 pp)
Collateral	One 8x10 B&W Photograph of Riley; Orange County Board of Supervisors' Official Biography of Riley (8 pp); Tribute to Brigadier General (USMC) Thomas F. Riley.

Abstract

An oral history with Orange County (CA) Supervisor Thomas F. Riley. This interview was conducted as part of a community history project. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Riley's involvement in the Laguna Greenbelt Association, as well as his local political and environmental involvement. Specifically, Riley speaks about Laguna Greenbelt Association founder, Jim Dilley; Riley following former Supervisor Ronald Caspers; the ambition and charm of Jim Dilley; Riley's negotiations with the Mission Viejo Company: public open space benefits in exchange for housing developments; the subsequent open space accomplishments of Orange County; the negative response to the construction of the San Joaquin Hills Corridor (toll road freeway) through the Greenbelt; the budget process in Orange County; negotiations with landholders to dedicate lands, particularly the Irvine Company and Aliso Viejo Company; Riley's hopeful uses for the Greenbelt; the cost of maintaining open space; the other advocates for open space in Orange County, such as Scott Ferguson; Peter Muth's \$500,000 donation for open space, on behalf of ORCO Block Co.; Riley's awards for his service; and the legacy and memory of Jim Dilley.

OH 2061

Narrator	Eric Jessen
Interviewer	Joanna Brand
Date	August 9, 1988
Language	English

Project	Laguna Greenbelt
Audio Format(s)	Digital Recording
Length	
Transcript	Edited Transcript (44pp); Final Transcript (18pp).
Collateral	None

Abstract

An oral history with Orange County government official, Eric Jessen. The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Jessen's involvement in open space legislation in Orange County and his perspectives on the Laguna Greenbelt. Specifically, Jessen discusses his current job as Chief of Planning and Acquisition for Orange County Harbors, Beaches, and Parks; his background with the Laguna Greenbelt as a concerned resident of Laguna Beach; Jim Dilley and his inspiration upon Jessen and other college students; the importance of the environmental groups of Orange County; the original General Plan of the County of Orange (adopted 1963) and its heavy emphasis of open space; dealings with Mission Viejo Company, which set the stage for acquiring land by open space dedication; assistance from the State Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Coastal Conservancy; the legacy of large landholdings in Orange County; the complex negotiations of land dedication; the intentions for the Greenbelt – parks v. wilderness areas; park General Development Plans; the intermediation of Orange County, between the State and local organizations; trail development in the Greenbelt; Laguna Beach as an artist's haven; and open space as the prominent environmental issue in Orange County and globally.