

Interview with Raymond Ede and Natalie Vermilyea

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Transcriber: Dee Morning

Raymond Ede and Natalie Vermilyea are standing in front of Heritage Hall in Magee Park.

NV: This is Ray Ede, a member of the original Carlsbad City Council after the incorporation in 1952. I'm Natalie Vermilyea, I was the first city employee and I took the council minutes.

Ede: This was our first city hall

NV: That's right and as you can see it was a rather small building but it housed the library in front and the offices in the middle and the police department in the back, which was actually the pastor's study. We'll continue this interview in the old Magee House

H-J: I'm Marje Howard-Jones and we're in the old Magee House on Saturday, September 29, 1990 and we're going to interview Ray Ede, a first city council member and Natalie Vermilyea first city clerk. We'll be talking about incorporation and how it came about. So the first thing I want to ask you is what was it like when it was just a town?

NV: Well, we came here in 1942, a few months after Pearl Harbor and everything in the way of social activities was rather restrictive. The town population was less than 3500 during the war years. When the war ended a number of military families settled here and the population burgeoned. We had Pine Avenue School, a number of churches, the Catholic, Episcopal and the Union were the biggest, wouldn't you say so Ray? (Ede nods yes). Social activities were rather restricted because people didn't have gas to

run around. Most of them were focused on school and church organized activities and I believe we had a town baseball team at the time, which was a real interesting group. We also had the beginnings of girl scouts and very active boy scouts. Most all the girls had skates.

H-J: Where did they skate?

Ede: There were sidewalks downtown around Grand and State provided by the academy and at the school and around the church.

H-J: So Ray you came with the academy in 1945?

Ede: We came in 1945. I had been with the Army and Navy Academy in Pacific Beach Since 1929 except for one year I took off to go to graduate school in Harvard. Then during the war years I took off to work for the Office of Censorship and then went in the Navy for a couple of years. When the war ended I had a choice to go back to Pacific Beach and the Brown Schools who had bought the academy property or come here to Carlsbad where the academy had relocated in 1936. We came down here and lived in the old Los Diego Hotel – upstairs – the academy owned it at that time. The post office was downstairs. Trains came practically through our front room as we had the rooms adjacent to the railroad tracks. We lived there for two years, until we built our own house in '47. Most of my activities were connected with the academy at that time. I really didn't know too much about the community. About '51 a group of people, General Worton, Spence Reese who owned the Carlsbad Hotel and Colonel Atkinson of the Army and Navy Academy decided that the city needed water, police protection, and fire protection – especially fire protection. General Worton who lived on Adams near Highland had a house near his burn down, so he wanted fire protection. Well, of course, they needed the

water because the San Luis River was being encroached upon by the ocean and gradually getting salty. Avocado trees were losing leaves. So they decided that the little section between the railroad tracks and the ocean and down to the San Diego Gas & Electric should annex to Oceanside. They had an election and the people who lived in that particular area were to vote. We heard a rumor that Spence Reese had moved several of his employees into the area so that they could cast ballots there. My wife's mother was going to Ireland at that time and we persuaded her to cast an absentee ballot. The result was a tie vote. Then a group, including the Editor of The Carlsbad Journal, Bill Baldwin, Dewey Mc Clellan, and many others got the idea that if we didn't form a city soon that bit by bit we would become Oceanside and we would lose our identity. Many town meetings were held, many speeches made and it was decided to incorporate in 1952. Many people were opposed to incorporation, in fact Mrs. Magee, who owned all this property here was. Mr. Manster, who lived up on Highland Street even got out a little publication against it. A man named Williams, who was an attorney, said it was illegal to incorporate because the San Diego County Charter prohibited it. The city had to go to court to resolve this. At last, even others who wanted to keep it as a small community and part of the county accepted it. The vote was in favor of incorporation. I don't remember the exact numbers, I have the papers at home, but it was very close. Following incorporation a great deal had to be done. We had to find a city clerk and we found Natalie. We had to have a police department and instead of hiring the county sheriff's department we went to Escondido and got Max Polkowski to head up the department made up of volunteers. We had an excellent fire department, entirely volunteers. We met

practically every night to set up ordinances and determine tax bases, etc. For a while we ran without any money. We borrowed some from the county and set up a bank account.

H-J: Did you have a model to follow when drawing up your ordinances?

Ede: We used the county pretty much, adopted them piece-meal until we could set up our own. A great many committees were formed to advise us of ordinances needed. We had a great deal of help.

H-J: Had either of you been involved with the county in getting the needed improvements like the lighting, streets, etc.?

NV: Not exactly. The county agreed to continue taking care of our streets for six months. Not that they did a very good job. They had an equipment yard in Carlsbad. I believe it was where Holiday Park is now.

H-J: It's my understanding that one of the factors (leading to incorporation) was dissatisfaction with the county.

NV: Well we were far away from their (headquarters)

Ede: There was a County Fire Station.

NV: State Forestry, wasn't it?

Ede: Yeah, State Forestry.

H-J: Well, that was because Mrs. Shipley gave them the land to do that – so she provided for her own fire protection.

Ede: That is still there. We used to meet there. We actually used that as a city clerk's office.

NV: Ed Hagen had a little toe hold there for a while until they told us that they needed the entire space for themselves.

H-J: Well, Natalie, you were the first city clerk?

NV: Actually I was the deputy city clerk. Colonel Hagen was the city clerk but I was the first PAID employee.

Ede: Natalie did the WORK.

NV: Colonel Hagen was retired from the Marine Corps and he had a lot of other activities.

H-J: Was the military the basic influence in town at that time as far as power structure?

Ede: There were a great many retired and active (military) living in the town – but not on the council, no. But many of them helped out. General Rogers, along with Allan Kelly, I suppose was the primary factor with us getting our metropolitan water. General Rogers worked a long time on that. He made many trips to LA and all that.

NV: Allan was not exactly in favor if incorporation before it happened so he was a convert.

Ede: I don't think Charlie Ledgerwood was for it. Some of the people living here for a long time were not for it because they could foresee taxes rising and problems that might be associated with a new city.

H-J: Charlie and Allan were both of the agricultural community. Charlie was chairman of the sanitation board. Do you want to talk about that Natalie?

NV: Well, I don't know a great deal about that Marje, except we had to deal with the sanitation board in the beginning. Remember there was a treatment plant off of what is now called Carlsbad Boulevard?

Ede: It was called Mc McClellan's Folly for some time. It wasn't adequate. It's been brought up to date a bit.

NV: It was decided to dissolve the sanitation district and absorb the duties into the city.

Ede: And the water company was just recently absorbed into the city. It existed on it's own for a long time.

H-J: So when the city was formed there were already two agencies, sanitation district and water district?

NV: And we had county fire protection but their primary duty was the watershed.

Anything outside of that was outside their jurisdiction.

Ede: Natalie, you commented that when you came there were a little over 300 people here. When the city was incorporated there were over 6000. So the city had grown.

NV: It really burgeoned after the war because many military families moved here who had men stationed at Camp Pendleton, liked the area and decided to stay here.

Ede: The active (Camp Pendleton) personnel have been very active in our community projects. Without them, our city would not be what it is.

NV: They were volunteer firemen and volunteer police. We had many military people in the original police reserves.

H-J: What about the real estate and developers. How did they feel about incorporation?

NV: They were there, but not in the numbers they are now of course. Well, just one instance I know about. Harold Anderson who actually was employed on the base as a plumber for a while formed Anderson and Robinson. His daughter married Red Robinson. There was a lot of land for sale because people couldn't pay the tax bill during the depression. Andy bought that strip on the west side of Roosevelt in the 2900 block between Grand and State. Camp Callan had dismantled some barracks and put them up

for sale so Andy bought some and set them up and made a plumbing yard. He (Andy) had bought that property for \$300 at a tax sale.

Ede: When we came in 1945 that half block on Ocean Street was for sale for \$5000 and where Mrs. Palmateer lives, that beautiful home, was bought for back taxes for just a few thousand dollars. We had a great deal of difficulty building our house just finding the materials in 1947. Right after the war materials were hard to get. In fact, our contractor went to every building supply house in the county to get hardwood flooring. He bought all of the sliding doors that were available and the last piece of heating equipment that was available in the county. So the building industry was starting out. There were many houses being built. There was a big building boom after the war. But the question you asked – the real estate agents, perhaps half of them were not in favor of incorporation. They were dubious about a city. Where would we get our tax base? Of course largely San Diego Gas & Electric was our tax base. That was THE thing that kept us going and as you know we still get excellent tax revenue from them.

NV: And the Railroad tax. It wasn't huge but we had to look at every single thing.

H-J: Now where did you set up your clerk's office?

NV: We were in Heritage Hall, 395 Harding Street. The county library which later became the city library with Georgina Cole was in the front. We just had desks around the middle part which would be where the pews were. Colonel Hagen's desk was like this and then we had a part time building inspector – remember Mr. Marter?

Ede: Yeah, and Mr. Bond was volunteer city engineer for a while.

NV: That's right, and the police department was in the back part. It used to be Saint Patrick's Catholic Church. I worked both places. I issued building and plumbing permits and took calls for the police department.

H-J: You were police dispatcher too. Did you get many calls – did people latch on to the idea to call city hall?

NV: No, but there was one couple that lived up on the Boulevard that came from someplace up in the L.A. area. And they started things going – they complained about everything, the roads, hot rodders. Course they came from the L.A. area and probably had problems up there or they wouldn't have moved down. We were a little cozy there but Max had the volunteer reserves build some shelves so we could have a law library and that was right behind my desk. So Max got in the habit if he needed something instead of researching himself, he'd say, "Nat, look up so-and-so".

H-J: Did he have a police car?

NV: His own car. It was a green Ford and the merchants downtown nicknamed it The Green Hornet. I guess that was a TV thing or something at the time. But he had, and I still have it in the historical files, a thing that clipped over the front door that says "Carlsbad Police Department". Then when he wanted to use it (the car) for his private use, he would take that thing off.

H-J: Did he have a patrol or did he wait for people to call?

NV: At first we just had Max, then Bud Walters came. I think he worked for almost nothing – there was no revenue coming in yet. I know Colonel Hagen and I would take turns, one month he would get paid and the next month I would get paid. Bud was a good

cop. They (Bud and Max) lived in the Carlsbad Hotel in the same room. So one would crawl out and the other would crawl in.

Ede: Manuel Castorena was sort of police commissioner and he used to ride the police car. Also the fire department, he oversaw them and he helped them out a great deal.

H-J: Ray, why don't you tell us who was on the first council?

Ede: Manuel Castorena actually I guess got the most votes and he kind of represented the Mexican-American section. Dewey McClellan I think probably got the next number of votes and he was the first mayor. And then I sort of represented the general public I suppose of Carlsbad. And George Grober was very active member of the Union Church and I suppose represented that particular group. He was a developer and very much interested in developing oil wells and I know when he was on the council he was still interested in that. Lena Sutton was also a member of the Union Church and was a very active member of that (group). She was interested in the water department. And my particular job was looking into finances and also the library. I remember I had to go to San Diego and check with the county librarian about what we should do. Gale _____ actually took packing boxes and made shelves (for the books).

NV: Plus, from time to time we would need to do some finger printing and a fellow by the name of Chester Crone, an ID expert, came over with his equipment. He got so he hung around there a lot. I want to say this about the Oceanside Police Department, I know it gets a lot of bad press, but when we first got our car radio set up, we didn't have two-way capabilities. So when I would get a call I would call Oceanside and they would broadcast to our unit. They helped us so much. There was a very nice dispatcher over there. He came over and helped us get started on records and things like that.

Ede: They were very cooperative. Actually the City of Oceanside didn't initiate the election, they just agreed to it, but they weren't pushing it. I think they were neutral. Of course it would have been very nice for them to get San Diego Gas and Electric and all that nice beachfront property. There wasn't any animosity between Carlsbad and Oceanside at that time.

NV: That came later over (other) things. We shared wavelength with them and they resented that. They wanted the air. But in the beginning, they did a lot to help us.

H-J: What were some of the first sub-divisions to come along?

NV: We didn't have sub-divisions then.

(General discussion, no conclusion about sub-divisions)

Ede: I remember one conflict Joe Cochran was head of the planning commission and Red Robinson owned property down by the lagoon right across from the McMahan Building. Robinson wanted to set up an office over there and the planning commission turned it down because it wasn't zoned for an office. It went before the council and they voted four to one (in Robinson's favor). I voted against it. Joe Cochran resigned over that because the council overrode his decision.

H-J: Did you have a general plan?

Ede: Dewey, having been a realtor for many years, knew enough so that he could sort of formulate a general design for the city.

NV: He was very concerned that the city get off on the right foot. I took the council minutes for five years and also the planning minutes. One time I was sitting there when Dewey came by my desk. He said, "You know Natalie, we're just like new parents.

We've got this new baby and we can raise it to be the way we want it." I thought that was a good way to put it.

Ede: After we got booted out of the fire station we met under the Twin Inns. There used to be a Hot Rod Group that met there (also). Bob _____ was a developer and he contributed a lot. He knew about ordinances, which were too restrictive and which were not restrictive enough. He attended regularly and was later on the planning commission. We didn't have any money. The county gave us a contingency fund and we had a loan from First Security Bank. I ran the first budget on a duplicator, it was for just a few thousand dollars.

NV: This is how I came to work for the city. Our two eldest children were at Chico State and early on it was apparent that we could not swing this thing. I knew I had to go to work. About this time, Bruce Smith came out of the Marine Corps and set up his law office. I asked him if he needed any office work done and told him I had a typewriter at home. He paid me a small salary – piecework. This was in '52 when the incorporation thing was going on. The day or so after incorporation I saw Dewey in the bank. I said "Well Dewey it looks like you're off and running". He said, "Yeah, we're kind of running on nothing, I don't know how we're going to get going". I told him I'm a legal steno and I don't need to be paid right now but I'll take the minutes. Then Bruce right away became city attorney.

Ede: This is just an example of how people came forward and volunteered.

H-J: And then you volunteered for the ladies police reserves.

NV: Yes, we needed someone to work the radio so I organized them. There were eight of them and I did my turn. When we got our radio we each worked from seven to twelve

p.m. one night a week. Of course I did city clerk work during the day. They were so eager. (NV unsuccessfully tries to remember all of their names) At that time we booked in Oceanside City Jail so if we had female prisoners they needed us. We had such great cooperation from the citizens.

Ede: The fire department was so good. They had it organized and were ready to jump. Whatever business they had, they'd leave and go to the fire.

NV: We all filled in for each other. Sometimes a policeman would have to go on the fire truck and if I had to book a female prisoner, a fireman would fill in for me. I was going to night school at the time. I took San Diego Sheriff Department classes, they were not as intensive as the police academy but they covered all the procedures.

Ede: One of the things we had to decide was which were the major and minor streets. George Grober lived on Jefferson so he said, "This should be a major street". Elm was widened and the trees were taken out while I was still on the council. A lot of people objected strenuously. That was the only time I spoke sharply and made someone a little unhappy. We had to take the elms down. It just had to happen.

H-J: How did you decide that Elm was the main east-west street?

NV: Because that was the access to the freeway. Before that there was no major east-west street.

Ede: Pio Pico, we had to name that.

H-J: How did the people that lived on Highland come down (to town)?

NBV: Basswood or Chestnut.

Ede: The freeway made a big difference to the city. A lot of people had their business on 101. They were going to lose business, which they did, including Twin Inns and Carlsbad Hotel

NV: In the beginning the police department had to patrol the freeway. Here we were so skimpy and there would be a huge accident and we'd have to go up there. I remember one time a Dolley Madison truck telescoped and all the pies and everything were all over.

H-J: Who decided where the freeway would go?

NV: We voted on that. I think we did. A guy by the name of Jacob Dykstra persuaded us that that was the best route.

H-J: Was the mayor's term of office two years?

Ede: Actually it was a year. Dewey said he'd take it for another year and then I should take it next year and then Manuel took it the following year. (NV & Ede try to list council members names and terms, finally NV says she has that information in the files)

H-J: This was wonderful. Thank you both for being here.

NV: Thank YOU. You know this was something that just had to be done.

Ede: Thank you both (pats their hands). I drove up Elm Street the other day and when I got to the top I looked over all that area – you know there was nothing there in 1945! - not a thing!!