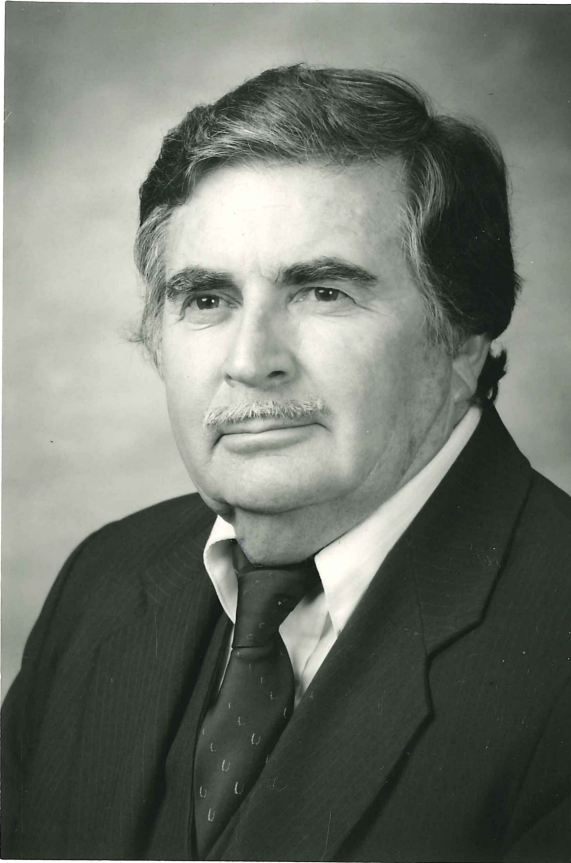


Field Guide to Coronado History:

Historian of Merit

By Bruce Linder



It's been said that historians are helmsmen of the soul; shaping one's upbringing through learning, constantly bringing the world into better focus, and steering one toward new horizons. Frequently, this magic touches not just the souls of men but also those of places and cities.

Dr. Ray S. Brandes, who recently passed away at his home in San Diego, bestowed these same gifts upon Coronado.

Pulitzer Prize winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin once said that the secret to success in writing a biography is that, "You've got to wake up with that person in the morning." With

Ray Brandes, you get the impression, looking at his body of work, that he woke up in the morning thinking of Coronado.

This not so surprising if you know of Ray's Coronado roots.

Ray's grandfather arrived on these island shores in the 1890s looking for work. It was said that he personally approached John D. Spreckels for a job and wound up planting many of Coronado's first trees.

By January 1924, Ray's family had settled into a small home at 145 D

Avenue when his mother went into labor. It being the middle of the night and no ferry running, a fast boat was rapidly procured and Ray was born at a doctor's office in San Diego. But Ray's birth certificate always said "Coronado," and he put things into perspective by saying that "I always felt I was born on the bay."

Ray later went through Coronado schooling and graduated from Coronado High in 1941, just in time to serve throughout the European campaigns of World War II. At the drop of a hat in his later years, Ray could tell you stories of growing up in old Coronado, of the Del, of Tent City, and of long-lost details of daily city life. He lectured around Coronado, helped the Coronado Historical Association, and inspired mainstream interest in our city's heritage.

A practicing and schooled historian of over fifty years standing, Ray's breadth of writing was notable. In penning 21 books and numerous extensively-researched articles in California and Arizona historical journals, his subjects spanned from archeology to western pioneers and from historic forts to San Diego's back country.

He would rise to achieve his PhD in history and teach for 31 years at the University of San Diego where he was also Dean of Graduate Studies. But, even with all of these accomplishments he always could provide a certain resonance when it came to historic Coronado.

Ray readily stepped in to help CHA founder Katherine Eitzen Carlin to complete the preeminent book of Coronado history, "The Enchanted Island," after Mrs. Carlin became ill in 1986. Later, in 1993, he set forth on his own project of Coronado history, "We Remember," an inspired book of Coronado biography, family histories, and personal remembrances. Through a zillion contributions from Coronado families and individuals (as well as from Ray and his USD students) this book captured many extraordinary dimensions of our island's history.

An "outsider" could not have provided these contributions to Coronado life. Ray indelibly understood that there was local DNA here to be considered and he wrapped that sense into his Coronado research and writing.

As Ray put it in his Introduction to “The Enchanted Island”:
“This book about Coronado ... will bring back a flood of memories for every person who has come to know the Enchanted Island. In our mind’s eye we saw a community which has an enduring coastal charm, where people have been concerned about the quality of life. We thought of Coronado as a village where visitors have always been welcome. We know that we were all visitors when we first arrived.”

In December 2012, Ray finally sat down to provide his many thoughts, remembrances, and opinions in an engaging oral history for the CHA archives. We still find Ray’s phenomenal impact in every corner of the Coronado Historical Association today. Most enduring of all, Ray’s voice and video image still lives in the permanent gallery of the Coronado Museum, where he repeats stories of old Coronado many times each hour, every time with a twinkle in his eye.

Come visit the Coronado Museum of History & Art and the archives of the Coronado Historical Association for this story and others.
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