Seventy-one years ago, through the benevolence of Miss Ellen Browning Scripps, a pier was constructed at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, on the shores of La Jolla, California.

At this ceremony, a new pier, to be built during 1987-88, will be named the "Ellen Browning Scripps Memorial Pier" in recognition of the many contributions of Miss Scripps to the birth and development of the institution. Without her support and encouragement, there might not have been a pier, a Scripps Institution of Oceanography, or a University of California campus in San Diego.
Teacher, journalist, businesswoman, philanthropist—Ellen Browning Scripps was described by The New York Times at the time of her death at age ninety-five in 1932 as having given “a new glory to American womanhood by a life that added the best of the new to the best of the old.”

Ellen Browning Scripps was born October 18, 1836, in London, England, the third of six children of James Mogg Scripps and his second wife, Ellen Mary Saunders. Her mother died when she was five, and a few years later, Ellen’s father moved the family to the United States to a farm near Rushville, Illinois. James Scripps remarried and had five more children.

Ellen followed the pattern of serious, hard-working women of her time. In 1858, she was one of the first women to graduate from an American college, Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. She then became a teacher, and during the Civil War, she raised money and contributed time to the Sanitary Commission and the Freedman’s Association. In 1868, she returned to the family farm to care for her ill father, and she remained at his side until his death in 1873.

Ellen joined her brother James Edmund Scripps in his newspaper enterprise, the Detroit Evening News, where she read proof, edited copy, and wrote a column, “Matters and Things,” aimed at women readers. This column was later syndicated as “Miss Ellen’s Miscellany.”

When Ellen’s half-brother Edward Willis Scripps, who was known as E. W., set out on his own in the newspaper business to found the Cleveland Penny Press in 1878, she backed him financially and wrote copy on a part-time basis. By 1900, she held shares in six of E. W.’s nine papers, and ultimately she held stock in sixteen.

In 1891, Ellen joined E. W. and his family when he bought a ranch at Miramar, north of San Diego. Six years later, she built her own home, the first of her life, in La Jolla, where she lived with her sister Virginia. Over the next three decades, Ellen’s investments earned her a considerable fortune, and she made a second career of active philanthropy. E. W. joined her in many worthy enterprises.
One of the early recipients of their philanthropic activities was a budding marine biology laboratory in San Diego established by UC Berkeley Professor William E. Ritter. In June of 1903, Ritter and his small staff were conducting a summer field study at the Hotel del Coronado, which attracted the attention of several prominent San Diegans. E. W., Ellen, and Virginia were among the visitors to meet Ritter in Coronado, and a friendship developed between the benefactors and the scientist that continued for many years. Ellen provided the money to acquire a permanent site for the oceanographic institution in La Jolla in 1907; and over the next few decades, she funded the construction of several buildings, a road to the campus, and a research ship. In 1915, she gave funds to construct and outfit the pier, which was completed in 1916. She also established an endowment fund for the institution.

Among the many other San Diego beneficiaries of the Scripps's generosity were Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation, Scripps Memorial Hospital, the Bishop's School, the San Diego Museum of Natural History, the San Diego Zoo, and several parks. In addition, Ellen made contributions to her alma mater, Knox College, and to establish and endow Scripps College in Claremont, California.

Scripps Institution, 1910
In the years after its founding in 1903, Scripps Institution grew from a temporary laboratory at the Hotel del Coronado and a wooden building at La Jolla Cove to a permanent marine station at La Jolla Shores. There were many needs at the young biological colony, and among them Director William E. Ritter listed a 1,000-foot pier. Scripps staff members wanted a place from which to launch small boats and to serve as a platform for drawing clear seawater for aquarium use.

By 1910, the marine biological laboratory was completed, and plans were under way for construction of several more buildings and facilities. Much of this early development was accomplished through the generous gifts of Ellen Browning Scripps and E. W. Scripps. But funds were not unlimited and many things were needed, so building of the pier was postponed, as the estimated cost of erecting one as long and strong as desired would exhaust the improvement funds. For the time being, staff had to continue launching their boats through the surf, and a temporary seawater piping system was set up.

A few years later, a Los Angeles construction firm with experience in building piers was selected, but the outbreak of World War I drove up the costs of materials and the project was delayed. A new gift of $100,000 was made by Miss Scripps, of which $34,000 was designated for building the pier with concrete pilings and equipping it with a seawater-pumping system. In May 1915, the pier contract was awarded to the Mercereau Bridge and Construction Company of Los Angeles, and work began soon after.

According to Raitt and...
“During July 1915, the workmen found that the depth of water and sand was constantly increasing over the estimates. The institution was faced with a crisis: if more money were not provided to extend the piles to these new depths the pier would have to be considerably shorter than had been planned. With her usual incisive judgment, Miss Scripps urged them to build the pier to its full length [1,000 feet], agreeing to pay the extra expenses if it could not be made up elsewhere in the budget for improvements.” The construction costs reached $36,000.

The site for the location of the pier was 300 feet north of the laboratory, where staff members had determined that there was “smoother and better water” than directly in front of the institution’s main building.

Wheeler. A visiting relative of biologist Francis B. Sumner wrote in her diary at the time, “The new pier and new building at the ‘Scripps Biological’ are finished. Before the formal opening Mrs. Crandall, Margaret [Sumner] and some of the other ladies gave an informal one—a picnic on the pier . . . A long board table with benches was stretched lengthwise of the pier, and we feasted and talked. . . . Then the ‘grave and reverend seigneurs,’ college professors, heads of various departments, wise men, women and children played. We had potato races, three-legged races, and various ‘stunts,’ which the dignified gentleman from across the continent [a visiting German] and his charming wife seemed to enjoy as much as the boys of the Colony. Then came the formal ‘Opening of the new Building and the Pier,’ with an effort to make the people understand in some degree, the objects and aims of the mysterious ‘Scripps Biological.’”
When the pier was completed, the scientists soon began using it for their investigations and observations. The first continuous recorder was a tide gauge, installed in 1916, primarily for studies by Professor George F. McEwen, a physicist, who soon afterward installed a complete weather station at the end of the pier. Daily readings of temperature, precipitation, and salinity have been continued from the pier since then. Among the other early pier users were chemist Eric G. Moberg, who collected daily water samples for analyses; biologist Winfred E. Allen, who assessed phytoplankton samples; and zoologist C. O. Esterly, who analyzed zooplankton and, for one study, took samples at four-hour intervals for a two-year period.

Since its construction, the pier has supplied the Scripps Aquarium with a continuous seawater supply for its aquarium tanks. The aquarium’s first curator, Percy S. Barnhart, fished from the pier or set traps from it to gather specimens for the aquarium and the fish collection. For many years, townspeople were allowed to fish from the pier for 25 cents a day or $20 for a lifetime permit. Scripps’s popular fishing spot was closed in 1941.

Over the years, the pier sustained damage from heavy storms and, in 1946, was extensively rebuilt at a cost of $65,000. During the winter storms of 1982-83, several of the pier’s 105 pilings were further damaged and cracked. Plans were prepared immediately to replace the pier with a slightly larger, all-concrete structure, and funds were sought from the state of California.

When construction is completed on the new pier, the old one will be removed, having served as a prominent landmark along the San Diego coastline for more than seventy years. The pier at Scripps has stood as a symbol of the institution, but more significantly it has been an important support facility for the research and educational activities of generations of Scripps staff and students.
Ground-Breaking Ceremony

ELLEN BROWNING SCRIPPS MEMORIAL PIER

Scripps Institution of Oceanography
University of California, San Diego

Thursday, March 26, 1987

3:00 p.m. Historical Retrospective
Sumner Auditorium

Master of Ceremonies:
Edward A. Frieman, Scripps Director

Speakers:
Roger Revelle, Scripps Director Emeritus
Jeffery D. Frautschy, former Deputy Director
James Stewart, Scripps Diving Officer
William A. Nierenberg, Scripps Director Emeritus

4:00 p.m. Ground-Breaking Ceremony
New Pier Site

Speakers:
Ellen Clark Revelle, Grandniece of Ellen Browning Scripps
Richard C. Atkinson, UCSD Chancellor

4:30 p.m. Reception
Scripps Aquarium
For more than eighty years, Scripps Institution of Oceanography has conducted a continuous search on the seas and in the laboratory for knowledge about the marine environment. Now a part of the University of California, San Diego, the institution is the oldest, the largest, and one of the most important centers for marine science research and graduate training in the world.

The scientific scope of the institution has grown to include physical, chemical, geological, and geophysical studies of the oceans as well as biological research. More than 250 research programs may be under way at any one time. The institution has a staff of about 1,200, including approximately 180 graduate students. The annual budget is about $60 million, from federal, state, and private sources.

Part of the original charter establishing the institution mandated a public aquarium and museum to serve as a window to the ocean world. Exhibits on the research work at Scripps and developments in oceanography may be viewed at the Scripps Aquarium, 8602 La Jolla Shores Drive. It is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily, including all holidays. A new, $8.2 million aquarium and museum is scheduled to open in 1990 through funding from individuals, corporations, and foundations. For further information about Scripps Institution, call the Scripps Public Affairs Office, (619) 534-3624.

Scripps Archives

The Archives of Scripps Institution of Oceanography collects materials that document the history of Scripps Institution and the history of oceanography. Collections consist of correspondence, photographs, diaries, drawings, and other materials. The Scripps Archives provides information on Scripps's history and is always ready to examine materials related to its areas of interest. Persons with historical materials portraying Scripps are encouraged to call the archives at (619) 534-4878.
New Pier


Length: 1,084 feet
Width: 22.5 feet
Seawater system: Three 1,200 gallon-per-minute pumps
Laboratory space: Approximately 1,000 square feet
Boat launching: New hoist with launching off both sides
Total cost: $3.95 million (state of California funds)
Design firm: Ferver Engineering, San Diego
Construction firm: Kiewit Pacific Company, Vallejo, California