

Basic Detail Report



Bessie Beth Coulter

Date

Early 20th Century

Medium

Photographic print

Description

Construction of the Bowers Museum began soon after the passing of Ada Bowers in 1929 and that by 1932 the museum had been built but could not yet open. It was amidst the Great Depression and the museum had run into funding problems: there was a general lack of interest from the city, there were no qualified staff to run the museum, and there was essentially nothing to exhibit. The Bowers' trust had been managed by First National Bank since 1924 and despite having already processed the gift

of the museum to Santa Ana, it was still in part responsible for realizing the grantors' dream. During a routine 1932 meeting with Bessie Beth Coulter, who was at the time serving as executor for her late husband's estate, she mentioned that the position of Curator at the museum sounded like an interesting job. Despite having almost no background in arts and culture, she piqued the interest of bank staff for having leadership positions in no less than four local organizations and committees. Two years passed between this conversation and her first entering the museum, but she was eventually selected for the position of the Bowers Museum's first Curator. In 1935 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was established and a portion of the money that went to Santa Ana was earmarked for the museum. With the staff and money problems solved, it was a matter of finding objects to exhibit. Through the WPA she was given two secretaries, an archeologist, and a clerk. To secure loans and donations to the museum she made house calls across the county, reaching out to descendants of Orange's earliest families. She started with practically nothing and built collections of artifacts from California's Indigenous peoples, the mission period, and the rancho families. Within just two years Mrs. Coulter had accomplished the enormous task of getting the Bowers museum ready for the public. After the museum opened, she remained a ceaseless force in the advancement of the Bowers' permanent collection and reputation

Dimensions

9 7/8 x 7 7/8 in. (25.1 x 20 cm)