

# Ellen Virginia Clark Revelle Biography



Ellen Virginia Clark Revelle was born July 31, 1910, in La Jolla, California, the daughter of Rex Brainerd Clark (1876-1955) and Grace Messinger Scripps (1878-1971). Her maternal grandfather was James E. Scripps, founder of the Detroit News. She was named for her great aunt, Ellen Browning Scripps, a founder of both Scripps College and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. She greatly admired Ellen Browning Scripps and tried to emulate her example especially in public service and philanthropy. She wrote several interesting articles on Ellen Browning Scripps, including an edition of her selected travel letters. Ellen Revelle perpetuated the family interest in publishing and philanthropy, but acquired a new interest in science through her marriage to Roger Revelle.

Ellen Revelle was a member of the first class of Scripps College (B.A. 1931) where she majored in psychology. She met Roger Revelle there; they married right after her graduation, on June 22, 1931 and set up housekeeping at the Scripps Institution of

Oceanography in La Jolla, where Roger Revelle completed his doctorate in oceanography. The Institution was a dusty shore station then; it did not gain its international reputation until the second world war, when oceanography became essential to naval warfare. Like many of the young oceanographers, Revelle went on active duty in the navy during the war, and the Revelle family moved hastily to Washington, D.C. After the war, the Revelles returned to La Jolla where Roger Revelle became director of the Scripps Institution. In 1955 he began work to establish a general campus of the University of California at La Jolla, which was founded in 1960 as UCSD. Ellen Revelle worked closely with her husband in support of the university. She also traveled with him throughout the world, but admits to a particular affection for Norway and Italy.

The Revelles had four children, Anne, Mary Ellen, Carolyn, and William Roger. While raising them, Ellen Revelle began a near half century of service as a trustee of Scripps College beginning in 1936. She has been an active alumnae and supporter of Scripps College throughout her life.

Ellen Revelle joined the La Jolla Play Readers as an expression of a lifelong interest in the theater, an interest that she continued through service on the La Jolla Playhouse board. She served on the boards of many San Diego organizations: The La Jolla Library Association, The Bishop's School, the La Jolla Art Museum, and the Women's Committee of the Musical Arts. She served on the board of the San Diego Symphony. The Revelle Series of the La Jolla Chamber Music Society was named in her honor. She was a founding member of Oceanids, the women's organization at UCSD, and for three years she edited its monthly paper. She was a member of the Board of Governors of the Scripps Memorial Hospital. She joined Lloyd Ruocco and others to found Citizens Coordinate for Century 3 in 1961, a public service citizens group that helped shape public policy on issues of growth, re/development and community in San Diego just as the city's growth exploded. She was also a founding member of BLOB (Ban Large Office Buildings) in La Jolla.

When Roger Revelle famously did not become chancellor of UCSD, the Revelle family moved to Harvard, and Roger became director of the Center for Population Studies. UCSD's Revelle College was named for Roger Revelle in 1965, and UCSD had a parade to acknowledge his founding role. On that same day, Ellen Revelle dedicated a new research vessel, R/V Ellen Browning Scripps.

The Revelles lived in Cambridge during the turbulent years of the 1960's. Revelle influenced a new generation of students at Harvard, including Al Gore, who remembered his lectures on the possible environmental effects of rising carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Ellen Revelle greatly enjoyed the Cambridge years. As a member of the Cambridge Garden Club, she helped to restore the Longfellow House garden. She also worked to welcome international students to Cambridge. She kept in touch with UCSD and the Revelles returned to La Jolla in 1976.

Ellen Revelle's philanthropy began at the Scripps Institution, where she and her husband donated sums to purchase oceanographic instruments that were beyond the means of the

institution during the depression. She and her husband made substantial donations to the La Jolla Playhouse and were founders of the UCSD International Center, which named the Ellen Revelle Pavilion in her honor in 1986. They were founders and supporters of the UCSD Faculty Club. They also established the Ellen & Roger Revelle Undergraduate Merit Scholarships at UCSD. They supported the Shiley Eye Center. After Roger's death in 1991, Ellen carried on providing funds in support of the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics at Scripps, which named the Revelle Building in her honor. When her aunt's 1912 pier needed to be replaced in 1986, Ellen contributed to the new Ellen Browning Scripps Memorial Pier.

In 1986 Ellen and her family went back into the newspaper business with the purchase of the *San Diego Transcript*. Ellen christened the research vessel Roger Revelle, named in honor of her husband in 1995, and then at age 86 she went to sea on its maiden voyage through the Panama Canal.

Ellen married Rollin P. Eckis, Roger's classmate and friend in 1995. He died in 1999. Ellen Revelle passed away on May 6, 2009.

At the dedication of the Ellen Revelle Pavilion at the UCSD International Center, Roger Revelle suggested that his wife be honored as:

...a woman of character. We are honoring her for her gentle ways and her strong will, her self-effacing, modest behavior, her passionate love of justice and her generous support of many good causes.