Orange County's history through photos

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Uncover Orange County’s past through historical images at Cal State Fullerton’s Pollak Library.

Seventy-five images are included in the exhibit “An Orange County Portrait: The Smart Studio Collection,” which depicts American life as experienced by this Southern California community in the early 20th century.

The selected photos from the Smart Studio Collection will be on display in the Salz-Pollak Atrium Gallery through Jan. 5.

These late-19th and early-20th century historical prints illustrate Orange County’s pioneers and common folk, business and agriculture, social and leisure time, and the changing landscape, said curator Stephanie George, CSUF’s Center for Oral and Public History archivist.

“The way we decided to tell the story was through the photographers themselves,” said George. “We wanted to focus on Orange County photographers.”

The work of the three key photographers – Mary Smart, Lou Hickox, and Benjamin F. Conaway – captured and documented the development of Orange County and its people for more than 80 years, she said.

The collection also includes images of distinguished Orange County natives, such as aviation pioneer Glenn Martin, Orange County’s first judge J.W. Towner, and President Benjamin Harrison during a visit to Santa Ana.

George said she found it interesting to see a photograph of Towner in a bathing suit at the beach.

The selected images on display are part of the 200 digitalized glass plates, film negatives, and prints purchased in 1967 by the Patrons of the Library and funded with grant money awarded through the California Local History Digital Resources Project in 2012.

After its run at CSUF, George plans to work with OC Parks and bring the exhibit to the Old Courthouse Museum in Santa Ana, she said.