

THE HUNTINGTON BEACH CIVIC CENTER AND THE POLITICS OF LOCATION

Shenandoah Grant Lynd

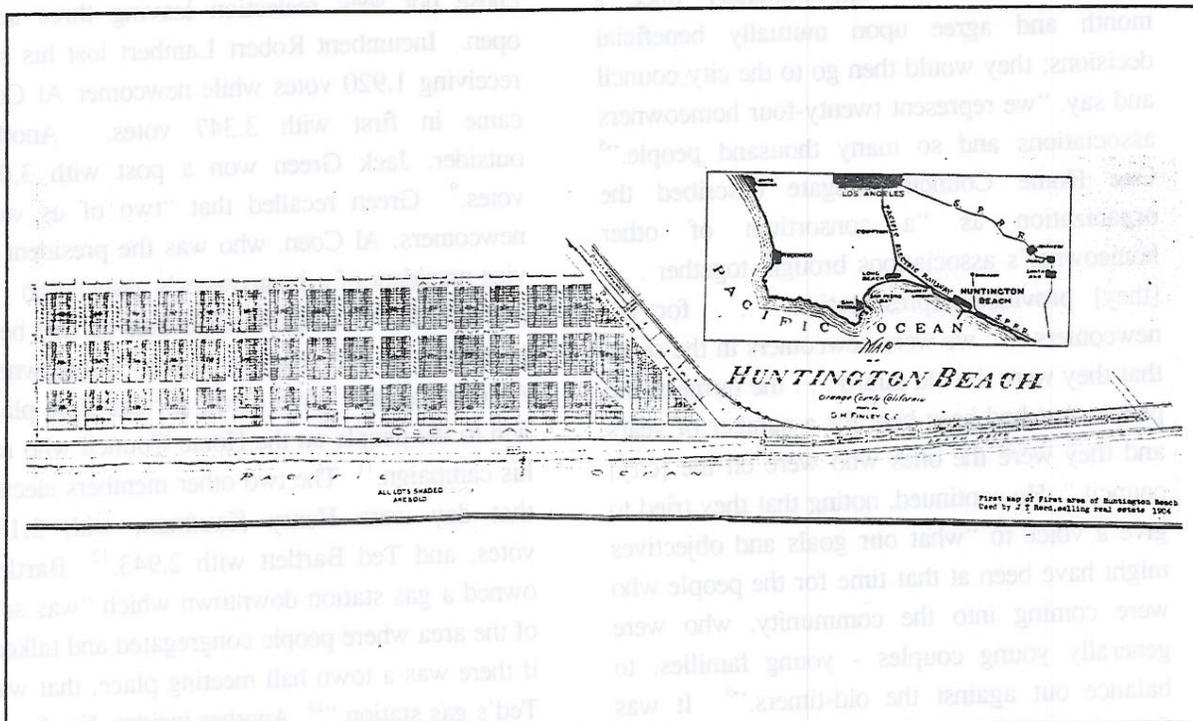
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Rapid growth during the 1960s, inspired changes within the California coastal community of Huntington Beach. Population growth and a series of annexations greatly increased the city's size, power structure, and stressed its existing facilities. Deteriorating conditions of the City Hall caused by age and increased numbers of city employees, a response to Huntington Beach's growth, soon overwhelmed the capabilities of the existing municipal facilities. In response to this growth, the necessity for a new city hall became apparent. The decision to build new facilities did not create a conflict, but the location for the site became controversial. This controversy was ignited from competing concerns of groups representing the original residents living on the coast and residents from the newly annexed areas. Oral history interviews that extract information from those intimate with the subject document the controversy surrounding the decision for the new city hall's location. These memories, combined with other primary and secondary sources, describe the city's growth and emergence of competing political groups. Despite controversy, a centrally located site was chosen to better serve all residents and a state of the art civic center was built and completed in 1974.

The Huntington Beach civic center, currently located at the corner of Main Street and Yorktown Avenue, is a state of the art facility that stands as a symbol of the city's population growth during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Standing in its present location for over twenty years, the civic center site may not seem that important to the general public or the city's large population. Yet, a civic center is something that all large towns need and Huntington Beach is no exception. The need for the facility never became an issue. However, the battle over the location for the civic center seemed to be a hot-button political issue. A look back on the location struggle today reveals the history of Huntington Beach and offers a glimpse into the politics of those exciting times.

Historical Background

The period of the 1960s marked a shifted change for Huntington Beach. Prior to that time, the city had been primarily a petroleum and agricultural town. The original city limits of 1909 had been 3.57 miles along the beach near what today is called the downtown area. Beginning in 1957 the city began a



The Original Townsite Map used to sell parcels in 1904. *The Ultimate Challenge*.

series of annexations and by 1970 Huntington Beach consisted of 26 square miles.¹ During the decade of 1950-1960, the city's population more than doubled, increasing from 5,237 to 11,492; by 1970 the population had shot up to 115,960, making Huntington Beach one of the fastest growing cities in the United States.²

Population growth in the city brought on a major housing boom, which, in turn, brought a shift in the power structure and politics of Huntington Beach. The burst of growth in housing construction continued through the 1960s and 1970s.³ As new homes were sold, more were built, pushing development of

additional housing to the newer areas of the city and away from what was originally the city boundaries. One individual who purchased a new home in 1963 referred to the decade as an exciting time. Recalling that his tract did not have enough residents to warrant postal service, he remembered traveling to the post office downtown where there used to be "a big chalk board on the wall and they would put up every month the number of new people . . . in Huntington Beach. When we moved here there was something short of about 34,000 people and each month we would see the figure 1,000, 1,200, 1,500 and allegedly we were one of the fastest growing cities in the country at the time . . . tracts were just going up all over the place."⁴

Residents in the newly developed tracts sought political power through homeowner's associations. They had a "loose confederation of associations that would get together under the

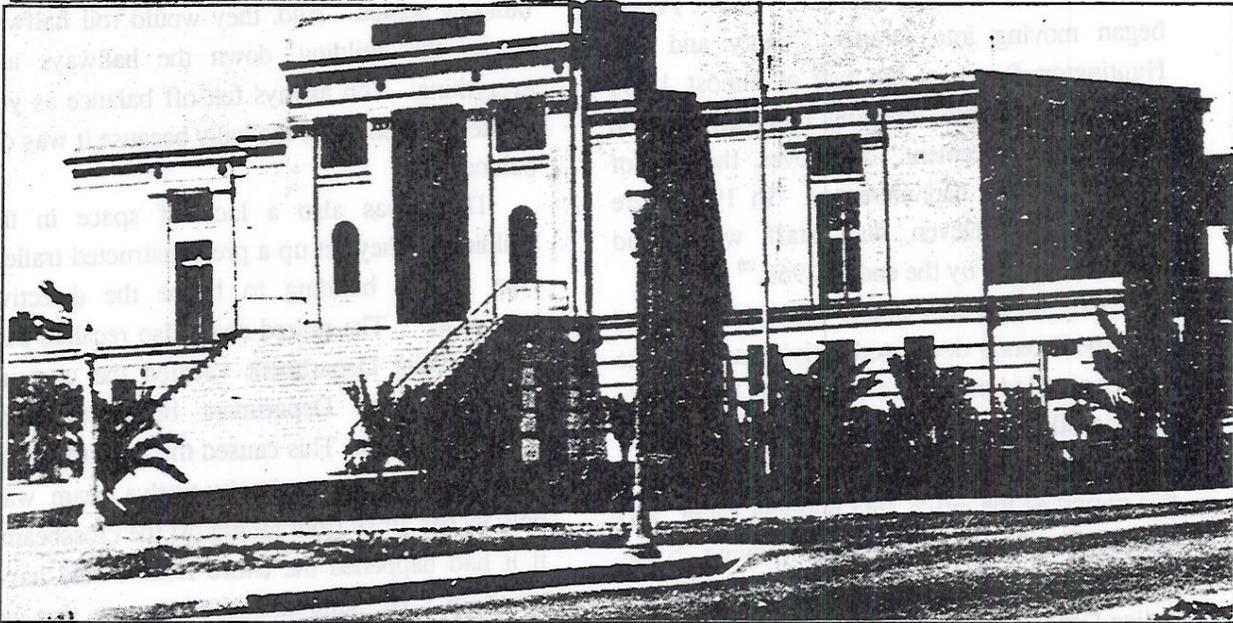
¹ Alicia Wentworth, ed., *The Ultimate Challenge: City of Huntington Beach Miscellaneous Historical Data* (Huntington Beach, CA: City Clerk's Office, by the author, 1995), 23; Don Keller, "This is How Huntington Beach Began," Wentworth, 42; Patti Bauer, "1973 History of Huntington Beach," Wentworth, 44-46.

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³ "Pictorial History of Huntington Beach," Wentworth, XXI.

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Subsequent elections brought more representation from the new areas of the city. In 1968 another election brought new members to the city council. Looking back, Green avouched that one of the newcomers was “Jerry Matney, who had been a homeowner’s association president . . . we were all friends and we knew each other for a long time so that was a change that was taking place at that time.” He continued, “we finally ended up, I think in [19]68 then we had a majority; we had Al Coen and Don Shipley. We worked closely with Don Shipley, and Jerry and myself.”¹⁷

Need for a New Facility

Concurrent with a climate of political struggle between the old-timers and the outlanders, the need for a new civic center presented itself. Growing rapidly, Huntington

Beach needed a facility that could deal with the new demands of a large city. Paul Cook, the traffic engineer at the time, explained that “as a city grows you need more police people and more firemen because the city’s bigger and you need more planners . . . more engineers and you have more parks so you have to hire more people . . . you get to a point where your city hall is getting too small and that is obviously why they were looking” for a new civic center site.¹⁸ Still another cited rapid growth as the major reason for the need.¹⁹ In short, the large number of people and the expanding city limits brought on the urgency for a new civic facility.

Pressure for a new building also came from the police department. They wanted a facility that could house a new police building. Lieutenant Michael Biggs articulated the demands that the growing city had put on the police department. He wrote, “The city increased its boundaries from 4.7 square miles

¹⁶ Green, interview.

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the old city, downtown and near the beach.²⁶ By the early 1960's the facilities had become unmanageable and the need for a fresh facility had become acute. As early as 1963 talk of a new facility could be heard. When asked what the issues were regarding the new civic center facility, then Councilman Coen responded: "just where to put it."²⁷ He was right.

That September, the city's Planning Department prepared a study called *The Civic Center Question*. The purpose of the study was "to help the citizens, Planning Commission, and city council answer that urgent, all-important question of what is the fate of [our] civic center."²⁸ The study asserted a definite need for a new facility and declared that "time for discussion and study is rapidly running out." Further, it alerted that population growth has "placed a fantastic demand upon all municipal services . . . interim facilities for personnel have been provided on a stop-gap basis which are no longer adequate." It was also noted that "the temporary buildings, make-shift additions and temporary quarters are no longer feasible, and any further provisions of this type can only be a waste of funds."²⁹

The Planning Commission report set out several conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions included the following: 1) "The need for larger civic facilities is an undisputed fact;" 2) "A decision to develop a civic center is urgent and necessary;" 3) "That decision should be based on the long-range need of the city and

other governmental agencies;" 4) The design "should include separate buildings for police, fire and library facilities;" 5) "Expansion of the present civic center site is economically unfeasible;" and, 6) "A location in close proximity to the geographic center of the city would best serve the needs of all citizens." Finally, the "purely objective study" recommended that the city council "reach an immediate decision to locate the permanent civic center on a site situated near the geographic center of the city for best service to all citizens."³⁰

On the back of the Planning Department report came additional pressure for action. A memorandum was issued about a month after the first report; the Planning Commission suggested that the information in *The Civic Center Question* report "be kept confidential, at least for awhile, in order to prevent the wildest type of speculation."³¹

Although the need for a new civic center was not an issue, the development of the facility was hindered as debate over the location developed; confidentiality apparently had been ignored and rumors of possible locations surfaced. In December 1963 a prominent resident, former Mayor Thomas Talbert, wrote the city council requesting that they keep any future facility in the downtown area. Asserting his claim, Talbert pointed out that he had moved to Huntington Beach in 1904 and was a chairman of the committee for the incorporation of the city in 1909. Writing with much authority, he informed the council: "I am writing you to protest against the moving of our civic center back into the country . . . even if the cost should be more, I think it would be good business to pay it and keep the civic center as near the ocean as possible." He then drew

²⁶ "Pictorial History," Wentworth, XV.

²⁷ Al Coen, interview.

²⁸ W. C. Warner, Planning Director, *The Civic Center Question* (City of Huntington Beach: Planning Department, September 1963), Civic Center Site #3 file of the inactive records in the office of the City Clerk, Huntington Beach, California. The Complete label title reads, "Civic Center Site #3 Opposite High School Reports & Recommendations 1963-1970." Category 200.10, Subject 69, Box 143, ID 3638.(hereafter referred to as CCS3), 1.

²⁹ Warner, 1.

³⁰ Warner, 2, 3.

³¹ W. C. Warner, Planning Director, to Huntington Beach City council and Planning Commission, 28 October, 1963, CCS3, 1.

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ran stories regarding the hearing. One paper alleged that "there are strong arguments favoring both of the final sites under consideration . . . for downtown . . . the land is already bought and paid for . . . Thus, affording a saving to the taxpayer . . . and it would be a high-rise edifice." On the other hand, site number three was more centrally located.⁴⁰

The public hearing on July 1 proved to be a high stressed discussion. Reports were read by the City Administrator, Planning Director and a special consultant; Councilman Green spoke in favor of the proposed site and Councilman Kaufman presented arguments against the location; then Mayor Coen opened the hearing to the public. The clerk presented written documentation from several homeowners associations in favor of the site. Issues of traffic control were raised by the superintendent of the local school district. People spoke out on both sides of the issues from suitability to loss of personal revenues.⁴¹ At one point Mayor Coen had to admonish the citizens and other groups to "speak to the merits and don't get emotional." The next day the paper read: "The March 10, 1933 earthquake had a 6.5 reading on the Richter Scale. On Monday evening, July 1, in the city chambers there was a jolt that measured about 10.7 on the Reynolds scale." The article referred to the fact that Planning Director Ken Reynolds had presented the merits and demerits of both sites, informing the council that site number three had a major earthquake fault line running through it.⁴² Nevertheless, the council voted for the site, along the exact same lines as they did two weeks prior with the resolution. Kaufman, Bartlett and McCracken voted for reconstruction and expansion of the old site;

⁴⁰ "Civic Center Hearing Set," *Huntington Beach News*, 27 June 1968.

⁴¹ "Public Hearing - Resolution of Intent," *CM*, vol. 10, pg. 491-493, 1 July 1968.

⁴² "High School Site Wins 4-3 Decision," *Huntington Beach News*, 4 July 1968, A1.

Coen, Green, Shipley and Matney outvoted the others in a decision to "develop the 9.23 acres near the high school after its acquisition from the Huntington Beach Company." So it was at exactly 12:10 am on July 2, 1968 that the council ended the drawn-out civic center location debate.⁴³

A New Site

Emotions were very mixed regarding the decision to build the new facility at Main Street and Mansion Avenue just east of the Huntington Beach High School. One writer noted that "some, among them the 'old-timers' and struggling downtown businessmen, may mark today on their calendars as the day the death sentence was pronounced for the downtown original town lot area . . . others will look upon the date as the spiritual birthday of a vigorous and renewed waterfront tourist convention mecca, its redevelopment no longer hanging in suspension upon the hope of a new civic center at the present Fifth and Pecan location." It was pointed out that development of the actual center would not come quickly as the councilmen faced problems of actual land cost.⁴⁴

Site number three garnered written reaction from the public as well. Most of the support came from residents of the newly developed tracts in the city; the newcomers liked the site more centrally located to all the citizenry. Shortly after the site was chosen, The Golden West Home Owners Association wrote the City Council and said they "would like to commend you on your choice for a site for the proposed civic center. We too, feel that the more central location will serve the city and its residents better."⁴⁵ Opposing the choice, the Property

⁴³ Harry Weisberger, "Civic Center Site by High School Approved," *Huntington Beach Independent*, 2 July 1968, A1.

⁴⁴ Weisberger, A1.

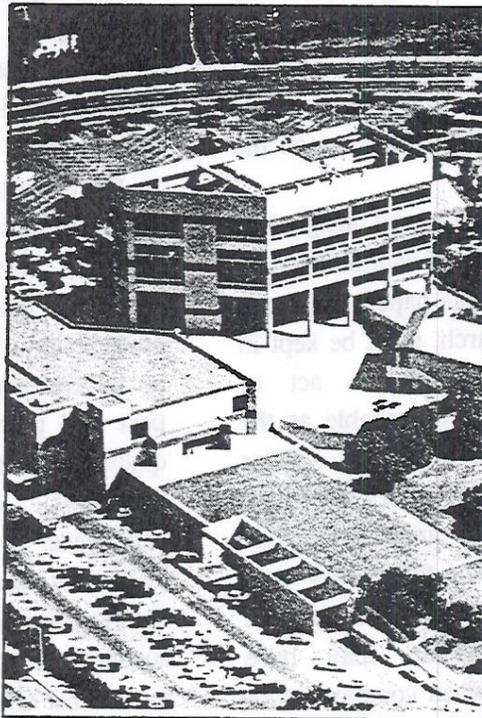
⁴⁵ Jack Maltby, President, Golden West Home Owners Association, to Huntington Beach City council, 26 June 1968, CCS3.

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O'Melveny & Myers and Stone & Youngberg.⁵⁷ Looking back, Councilman Jack Green said that "All of these structures would never have been built if they had not been built at that time."

He notes that passing the bonds and the securing the funds were the keys to getting the facility built.⁵⁸

Construction began in January 1972. That September local newspapers covered the first tour of the facility. They reported: "Already eight months along on a 20 month schedule . . . the new \$6 million civic center project now rising at Main, Mansion and 17th streets . . . based on a 20 month work schedule the project is six percent ahead of the timetable which places the completion date at October 7, 1973."⁵⁹ That date was later pushed back; however, things progressed smoothly. By May 1973 the city council had considered requests from the Masonic Lodge and Huntington Beach Historical Society who wanted to secure the formality of laying the cornerstone.⁶⁰



The New City Hall Complex-dedicated March, 1974. *The Ultimate Challenge.*

On March 30, 1974 the city held dedication and grand opening ceremonies for the new civic center; it included a lot of hoopla. Friday night, March 29 the civic center facilities were lit up for the first time. Due to an impending energy crisis and conservation effort, a local paper had to alert city residents not to call authorities about the lights - they were only a reminder that a "formal dedication of the elegant new civic

center" was taking place the next day.⁶¹ Former secretary of health, education and welfare, Robert Finch, gave the keynote address at the big event. Finch, a noteworthy national figure, had entered politics in 1958; under Vice-President Richard Nixon, he had served as administrative assistant. Along with the prominent speaker, the ceremonies included several bands and lasted from 9:30 a.m. until after 3:00 p.m.

The new civic center stands today as a symbol of the crossroads that Huntington Beach faced three decades ago. Built to serve a population of 270,000, the six story administration offices, modern multi-media equipped council chambers, development facilities and state of the art police facility are housed together in a grand central plaza.⁶² Eventually, Mansion Avenue became Yorktown and the easily accessed civic center stands proudly at the corner of Yorktown and Main Street today.⁶³

⁵⁷ "Presentation on Formation of Non-Profit Corporation," *CM*, vol. 12, pg. 350, 21 December 1970.

⁵⁸ Jack Green, interview.

⁵⁹ "October 7, 1973 Look" and "Today's Look," *Huntington Beach News*, 28 September 1972. The tour took place the day before with Kurt Meyer and project inspector Mike Fitzpatrick leading the Design Review Board.

⁶⁰ "Laying of Cornerstones," *CM*, vol. 14, pg. 792, 21 May 1973. Unfortunately, there appears to be no evidence as to who ultimately laid the cornerstone or if anyone ever did.

⁶¹ "Civic Center Will Be Lit Up Friday," *Huntington Beach News*, 28 March 1974, A1.

⁶² "Pictorial History," Wentworth, XXVI; "Huntington Beach Civic Center" brochure, *MB*.

⁶³ Floyd Belsito, City Administrator, to Mayor and Council Members, 27 July 1977, Civic Center General file of the inactive records in the office of the City Clerk.

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on the timing of the decision and the use of federal money in securing the land and facility, he recalls that "it was just the time when you could get things accomplished." He proudly compares his city's civic center with those of surrounding cities and notes that other cities did not act when they had a chance. Contrasting Newport Beach he asserts, "it is this wealthy community and they really think they're great down there, and they've got this civic center that is a mess - they ought to be ashamed of themselves."⁷⁰

Speaking of the present site, Green stands by the decision to put the civic facility at Main and Yorktown. He avouched: "The location was the biggest battle . . . they recommend a number of sites, one of them, and I, to this day I kind of wish it had occurred, would have been to put the city hall up at Talbert Avenue across the street from the city - public - big [Central] library, but that was out of downtown and they were still of that attitude even back in the early 1970s of 'we want it downtown' In fact, Ernie Gisler was on the council with me [and] was defeated for reelection because he endorsed the site where the city hall is now because the people down there didn't consider that downtown. And, I don't know, if its not downtown, I don't know what the hell it is. It *is* downtown."⁷¹

Paul Cook, the second interviewee, presents a contrasting view from a downtown perspective. Once employed by the city, he worked for many years in the old city hall near the beach. He was traffic engineer from 1965 to 1970; director of public works from 1978 to 1987; city administrator from 1987 to 1990; he is now self-employed and has an engineering consulting firm in downtown Huntington Beach, just a stone's throw from the ocean.⁷²

⁷⁰ Jack Green, interview.

⁷¹ Green, interview.

⁷² Paul Cook, interview.

Cook considers himself a "downtowner." What he thought "was the best option . . . was to build the city hall over on Atlanta and Lake which is still vacant land . . . that would have kept the civic center in the downtown area, near the beach, where in my opinion, it belongs." He condemns the decision saying they didn't even put it in the center of town: "right now it's in neither place, it's not in the center of town and it's not near the, what should be the hub of the city . . . politics as it is . . . where it is now is sort of between neither here nor there in my opinion. It is just far enough away from the hub, what I consider should be the hub, and that's the beach area, and its not even close to the geographical center of town. That to me, was by far, the largest mistake that the city [long pause] ever made. That took a city that could have grown and been known to be progressive, like Newport Beach is perceived by outsiders, to a city that virtually nobody ever heard of outside the of the Orange County/L[os] A[ngeles] area."⁷³

Earle Robitaille constitutes the third oral history. He is a retired career law enforcement officer. Robitaille joined the Huntington Beach Police Force in 1963 as an officer; he subsequently became sergeant, lieutenant, then captain; he was appointed chief of police on July 31, 1969, he remained in that capacity until he retired in 1987. Robitaille did not see himself as an old-timer or newcomer. When asked about that he said, "The camps, no! No, I made a concerted effort never to get stereotyped as a newcomer, as an upstart, as an old-timer, as any of those." Explaining his law enforcement duties, he maintained that "I had to, your job as police chief is to serve everybody in the community, you can't be taking sides with anybody, even the political sides, which becomes very difficult at times . . . but, that's just part of the job."⁷⁴

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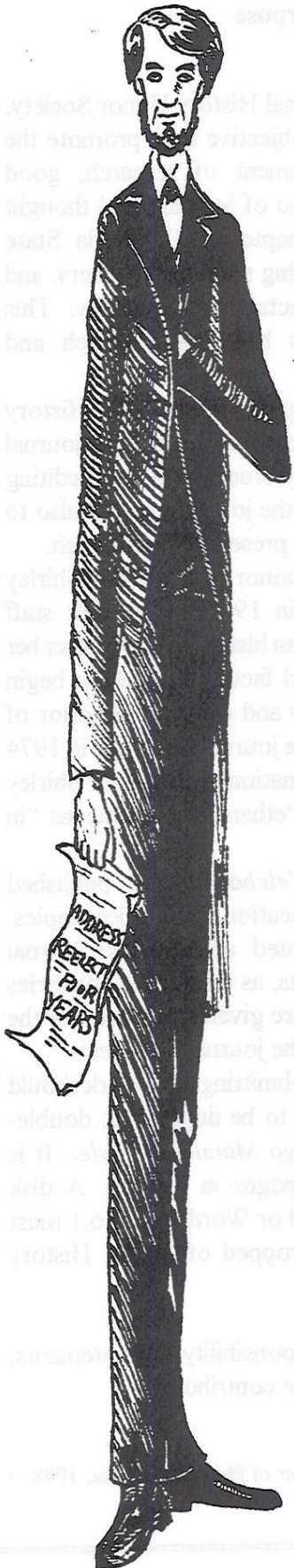
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Kevin Dawson

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Marla Peppers

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Lara Kasper-Buckareff

Contributors

Ken Hough, a graduate student at CSUF with an emphasis on Turn-of-the-Century America, co-authored "Port of Sin" for a graduate seminar. Ken plans to teach history and become a screenwriter.

Lara Kasper-Buckareff received her B.A. in history in the Fall of 1997. Her paper, "The Agricultural Bracero Program of WWII" was written for an undergraduate historical writing course. She is currently involved in the discernment process to become an Episcopal priest.

Paul M. Kendel, a graduate student at CSUF, wrote "The Rhetoric of Post-Colonial Theory" as a part of his M.A. thesis on the British Empire. He aims for a doctoral degree in British History.

Andrew Kreighbaum received his B.A. in history from CSUF in the spring of 1997. He wrote "Rommel: German Patriot or Hitler's Pawn?" for a course in historical writing. He will soon be entering the officer's training program for the United States Coast Guard.

Sharon Kovach is a graduate student in Anthropology with an emphasis on archeology. She wrote "Khmer Empire: Replication of the Mandala at Angkor Wat" for a course on historical writing. Sharon is currently involved in ceramic analysis at a site in Honduras. She plans to teach anthropology.

John W. Lantz, a graduate history student focusing on nineteenth century America, wrote "Water and the Law in California, 1898" for a course in California history. John plans to teach at the community college or high school level.

Shenandoah Grant Lynd wrote "The Huntington Beach Civic Center and the Politics of Location" for a course in Community History. He is a graduate history student with an emphasis on U.S. History after World War II. He will begin a Doctoral program at UC Riverside in the Fall of 1998.

Marla F. Peppers is a graduate history student at CSUF focusing on Ethnic and Women's studies in nineteenth century America. She wrote "The Economic Exploitation of Black Women in the Antebellum South" for a course entitled Democracy on Trial, 1845-1877. She hopes to teach at the community college level.

Allison Rubalcava, a graduate student of history at CSUF wrote "Arab Nationalism and Islam" for a history seminar. Although Allison's academic emphasis is Modern Middle Eastern history, she currently teaches science at a private school. She plans to teach at the community college level and pursue a Ph. D. Program

Welebaethan 1998 Prize Winners

The Theta Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta awards four prizes each year for the best papers in that edition of the Welebaethan. The categories include: Best Overall Paper, Best United States History Paper, Best Western History Paper, and Best European History Paper.

Winners are selected by an Awards Committee. The final edited versions are printed in this year's Welebaethan. A prize of \$100.00 is awarded to the Best Overall Paper; prizes of \$50.00 are awarded to the other three authors. The 1998 prize winners include:

Lawrence B. de Graaf Prize for Best Overall Paper:

Dana Blakemore and Kenneth Hough, "Port of Sin: The Legal Plight of Chinese Prostitutes in San Francisco"

William B. Langsdorf Prize in Western History:

Shenandoah Lynd, "The Huntington Beach Civic Center and the Politics of Location"

Prize in United States History:

Marla Peppers, "The Economic Exploitation of Black Women in the Antebellum South"

Ric Miller Prize in European History:

Paul Kendel: "The Rhetoric of Post-Colonial Theory"

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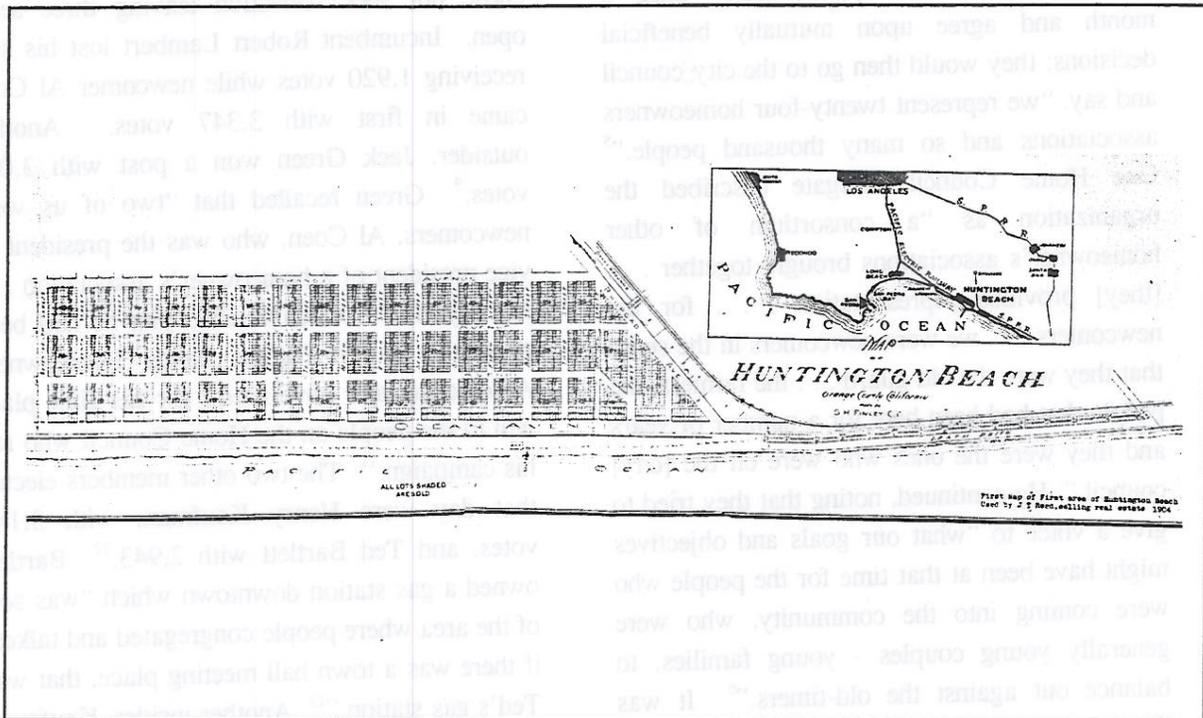
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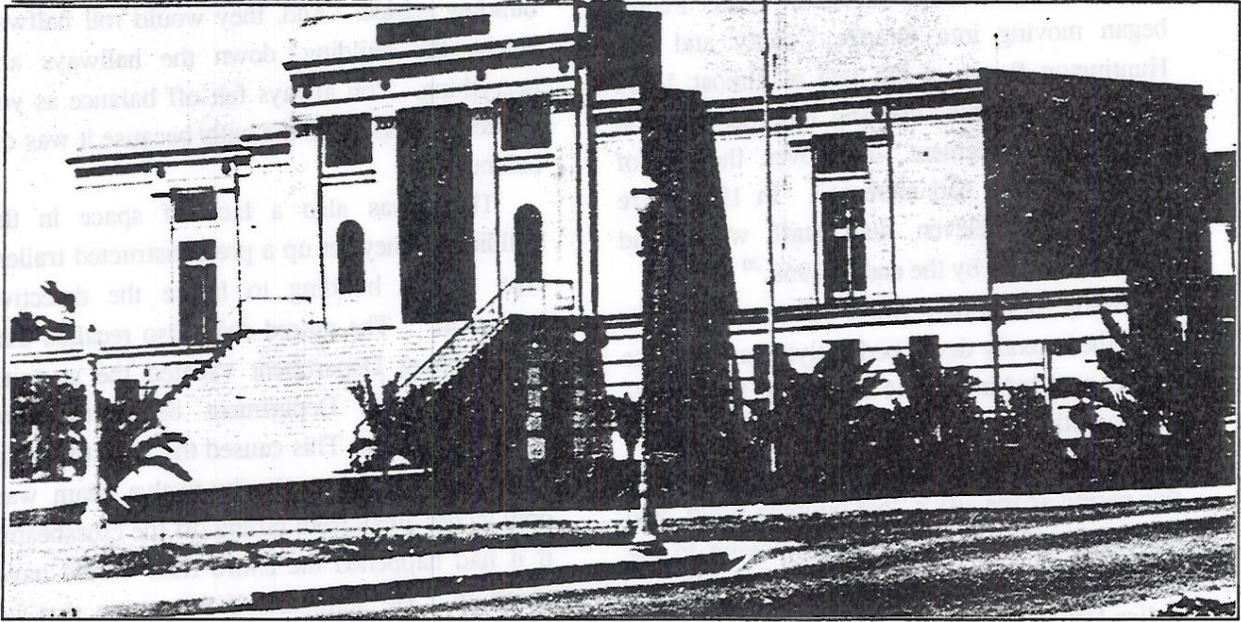
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the old city, downtown and near the beach.²⁶ By the early 1960's the facilities had become unmanageable and the need for a fresh facility had become acute. As early as 1963 talk of a new facility could be heard. When asked what the issues were regarding the new civic center facility, then Councilman Coen responded: "just where to put it."²⁷ He was right.

That September, the city's Planning Department prepared a study called *The Civic Center Question*. The purpose of the study was "to help the citizens, Planning Commission, and city council answer that urgent, all-important question of what is the fate of [our] civic center."²⁸ The study asserted a definite need for a new facility and declared that "time for discussion and study is rapidly running out." Further, it alerted that population growth has "placed a fantastic demand upon all municipal services . . . interim facilities for personnel have been provided on a stop-gap basis which are no longer adequate." It was also noted that "the temporary buildings, make-shift additions and temporary quarters are no longer feasible, and any further provisions of this type can only be a waste of funds."²⁹

The Planning Commission report set out several conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions included the following: 1) "The need for larger civic facilities is an undisputed fact;" 2) "A decision to develop a civic center is urgent and necessary;" 3) "That decision should be based on the long-range need of the city and

other governmental agencies;" 4) The design "should include separate buildings for police, fire and library facilities;" 5) "Expansion of the present civic center site is economically unfeasible;" and, 6) "A location in close proximity to the geographic center of the city would best serve the needs of all citizens." Finally, the "purely objective study" recommended that the city council "reach an immediate decision to locate the permanent civic center on a site situated near the geographic center of the city for best service to all citizens."³⁰

On the back of the Planning Department report came additional pressure for action. A memorandum was issued about a month after the first report; the Planning Commission suggested that the information in *The Civic Center Question* report "be kept confidential, at least for awhile, in order to prevent the wildest type of speculation."³¹

Although the need for a new civic center was not an issue, the development of the facility was hindered as debate over the location developed; confidentiality apparently had been ignored and rumors of possible locations surfaced. In December 1963 a prominent resident, former Mayor Thomas Talbert, wrote the city council requesting that they keep any future facility in the downtown area. Asserting his claim, Talbert pointed out that he had moved to Huntington Beach in 1904 and was a chairman of the committee for the incorporation of the city in 1909. Writing with much authority, he informed the council: "I am writing you to protest against the moving of our civic center back into the country . . . even if the cost should be more, I think it would be good business to pay it and keep the civic center as near the ocean as possible." He then drew

²⁶ "Pictorial History," Wentworth, XV.

²⁷ Al Coen, interview.

²⁸ W. C. Warner, Planning Director, *The Civic Center Question* (City of Huntington Beach: Planning Department, September 1963), Civic Center Site #3 file of the inactive records in the office of the City Clerk, Huntington Beach, California. The Complete label title reads, "Civic Center Site #3 Opposite High School Reports & Recommendations 1963-1970." Category 200.10, Subject 69, Box 143, ID 3638.(hereafter referred to as CCS3), 1.

²⁹ Warner, 1.

³⁰ Warner, 2, 3.

³¹ W. C. Warner, Planning Director, to Huntington Beach City council and Planning Commission, 28 October, 1963, CCS3, 1.

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ran stories regarding the hearing. One paper alleged that "there are strong arguments favoring both of the final sites under consideration . . . for downtown . . . the land is already bought and paid for . . . Thus, affording a saving to the taxpayer . . . and it would be a high-rise edifice." On the other hand, site number three was more centrally located.⁴⁰

The public hearing on July 1 proved to be a high stressed discussion. Reports were read by the City Administrator, Planning Director and a special consultant; Councilman Green spoke in favor of the proposed site and Councilman Kaufman presented arguments against the location; then Mayor Coen opened the hearing to the public. The clerk presented written documentation from several homeowners associations in favor of the site. Issues of traffic control were raised by the superintendent of the local school district. People spoke out on both sides of the issues from suitability to loss of personal revenues.⁴¹ At one point Mayor Coen had to admonish the citizens and other groups to "speak to the merits and don't get emotional." The next day the paper read: "The March 10, 1933 earthquake had a 6.5 reading on the Richter Scale. On Monday evening, July 1, in the city chambers there was a jolt that measured about 10.7 on the Reynolds scale." The article referred to the fact that Planning Director Ken Reynolds had presented the merits and demerits of both sites, informing the council that site number three had a major earthquake fault line running through it.⁴² Nevertheless, the council voted for the site, along the exact same lines as they did two weeks prior with the resolution. Kaufman, Bartlett and McCracken voted for reconstruction and expansion of the old site;

Coen, Green, Shipley and Matney outvoted the others in a decision to "develop the 9.23 acres near the high school after its acquisition from the Huntington Beach Company." So it was at exactly 12:10 am on July 2, 1968 that the council ended the drawn-out civic center location debate.⁴³

A New Site

Emotions were very mixed regarding the decision to build the new facility at Main Street and Mansion Avenue just east of the Huntington Beach High School. One writer noted that "some, among them the 'old-timers' and struggling downtown businessmen, may mark today on their calendars as the day the death sentence was pronounced for the downtown original town lot area . . . others will look upon the date as the spiritual birthday of a vigorous and renewed waterfront tourist convention mecca, its redevelopment no longer hanging in suspension upon the hope of a new civic center at the present Fifth and Pecan location." It was pointed out that development of the actual center would not come quickly as the councilmen faced problems of actual land cost.⁴⁴

Site number three garnered written reaction from the public as well. Most of the support came from residents of the newly developed tracts in the city; the newcomers liked the site more centrally located to all the citizenry. Shortly after the site was chosen, The Golden West Home Owners Association wrote the City Council and said they "would like to commend you on your choice for a site for the proposed civic center. We too, feel that the more central location will serve the city and its residents better."⁴⁵ Opposing the choice, the Property

⁴⁰ "Civic Center Hearing Set," *Huntington Beach News*, 27 June 1968.

⁴¹ "Public Hearing - Resolution of Intent," *CM*, vol. 10, pg. 491-493, 1 July 1968.

⁴² "High School Site Wins 4-3 Decision," *Huntington Beach News*, 4 July 1968, A1.

⁴³ Harry Weisberger, "Civic Center Site by High School Approved," *Huntington Beach Independent*, 2 July 1968, A1.

⁴⁴ Weisberger, A1.

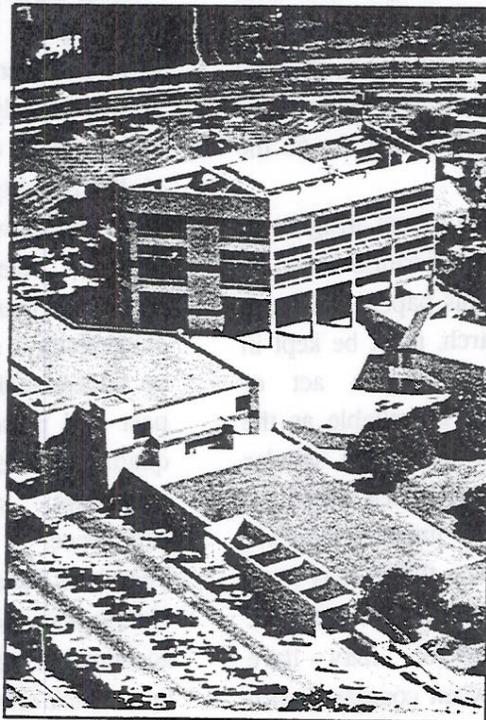
⁴⁵ Jack Maltby, President, Golden West Home Owners Association, to Huntington Beach City council, 26 June 1968, CCS3.

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O'Melveny & Myers and Stone & Youngberg.⁵⁷ Looking back, Councilman Jack Green said that "All of these structures would never have been built if they had not been built at that time."

He notes that passing the bonds and the securing the funds were the keys to getting the facility built.⁵⁸

Construction began in January 1972. That September local newspapers covered the first tour of the facility. They reported: "Already eight months along on a 20 month schedule . . . the new \$6 million civic center project now rising at Main, Mansion and 17th streets . . . based on a 20 month work schedule the project is six percent ahead of the timetable which places the completion date at October 7, 1973."⁵⁹ That date was later pushed back; however, things progressed smoothly. By May 1973 the city council had considered requests from the Masonic Lodge and Huntington Beach Historical Society who wanted to secure the formality of laying the cornerstone.⁶⁰



The New City Hall Complex-dedicated March, 1974. *The Ultimate Challenge.*

On March 30, 1974 the city held dedication and grand opening ceremonies for the new civic center; it included a lot of hoopla. Friday night, March 29 the civic center facilities were lit up for the first time. Due to an impending energy crisis and conservation effort, a local paper had to alert city residents not to call authorities about the lights - they were only a reminder that a "formal dedication of the elegant new civic center" was taking place the next day.⁶¹ Former secretary of health, education and welfare, Robert Finch, gave the keynote address at the big event. Finch, a noteworthy national figure, had entered politics in 1958; under Vice-President Richard Nixon, he had served as administrative assistant. Along with the prominent speaker, the ceremonies included several bands and lasted from 9:30 a.m. until after 3:00 p.m.

The new civic center stands today as a symbol of the crossroads that Huntington Beach faced three decades ago. Built to serve a population of 270,000, the six story administration offices, modern multi-media equipped council chambers, development facilities and state of the art police facility are housed together in a grand central plaza.⁶² Eventually, Mansion Avenue became Yorktown and the easily accessed civic center stands proudly at the corner of Yorktown and Main Street today.⁶³

⁵⁷ "Presentation on Formation of Non-Profit Corporation," *CM*, vol. 12, pg. 350, 21 December 1970.

⁵⁸ Jack Green, interview.

⁵⁹ "October 7, 1973 Look" and "Today's Look," *Huntington Beach News*, 28 September 1972. The tour took place the day before with Kurt Meyer and project inspector Mike Fitzpatrick leading the Design Review Board.

⁶⁰ "Laying of Cornerstones," *CM*, vol. 14, pg. 792, 21 May 1973. Unfortunately, there appears to be no evidence as to who ultimately laid the cornerstone or if anyone ever did.

⁶¹ "Civic Center Will Be Lit Up Friday," *Huntington Beach News*, 28 March 1974, A1.

⁶² "Pictorial History," Wentworth, XXVI: "Huntington Beach Civic Center" brochure, *MB*.

⁶³ Floyd Belsito, City Administrator, to Mayor and Council Members, 27 July 1977, Civic Center General file of the inactive records in the office of the City Clerk.

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on the timing of the decision and the use of federal money in securing the land and facility, he recalls that "it was just the time when you could get things accomplished." He proudly compares his city's civic center with those of surrounding cities and notes that other cities did not act when they had a chance. Contrasting Newport Beach he asserts, "it is this wealthy community and they really think they're great down there, and they've got this civic center that is a mess - they ought to be ashamed of themselves."⁷⁰

Speaking of the present site, Green stands by the decision to put the civic facility at Main and Yorktown. He avouched: "The location was the biggest battle . . . they recommend a number of sites, one of them, and I, to this day I kind of wish it had occurred, would have been to put the city hall up at Talbert Avenue across the street from the city - public - big [Central] library, but that was out of downtown and they were still of that attitude even back in the early 1970s of 'we want it downtown' In fact, Ernie Gisler was on the council with me [and] was defeated for reelection because he endorsed the site where the city hall is now because the people down there didn't consider that downtown. And, I don't know, if its not downtown, I don't know what the hell it is. It is downtown."⁷¹

Paul Cook, the second interviewee, presents a contrasting view from a downtown perspective. Once employed by the city, he worked for many years in the old city hall near the beach. He was traffic engineer from 1965 to 1970; director of public works from 1978 to 1987; city administrator from 1987 to 1990; he is now self-employed and has an engineering consulting firm in downtown Huntington Beach, just a stone's throw from the ocean.⁷²

⁷⁰ Jack Green, interview.

⁷¹ Green, interview.

⁷² Paul Cook, interview.

Cook considers himself a "downtowner." What he thought "was the best option . . . was to build the city hall over on Atlanta and Lake which is still vacant land . . . that would have kept the civic center in the downtown area, near the beach, where in my opinion, it belongs." He condemns the decision saying they didn't even put it in the center of town: "right now it's in neither place, it's not in the center of town and it's not near the, what should be the hub of the city . . . politics as it is . . . where it is now is sort of between neither here nor there in my opinion. It is just far enough away from the hub, what I consider should be the hub, and that's the beach area, and its not even close to the geographical center of town. That to me, was by far, the largest mistake that the city [long pause] ever made. That took a city that could have grown and been known to be progressive, like Newport Beach is perceived by outsiders, to a city that virtually nobody ever heard of outside the of the Orange County/L[os] A[ngeles] area."⁷³

Earle Robitaille constitutes the third oral history. He is a retired career law enforcement officer. Robitaille joined the Huntington Beach Police Force in 1963 as an officer; he subsequently became sergeant, lieutenant, then captain; he was appointed chief of police on July 31, 1969, he remained in that capacity until he retired in 1987. Robitaille did not see himself as an old-timer or newcomer. When asked about that he said, "The camps, no! No, I made a concerted effort never to get stereotyped as a newcomer, as an upstart, as an old-timer, as any of those." Explaining his law enforcement duties, he maintained that "I had to, your job as police chief is to serve everybody in the community, you can't be taking sides with anybody, even the political sides, which becomes very difficult at times . . . but, that's just part of the job."⁷⁴

⁷³ Cook, interview.

⁷⁴ Earl Robitaille, interview.

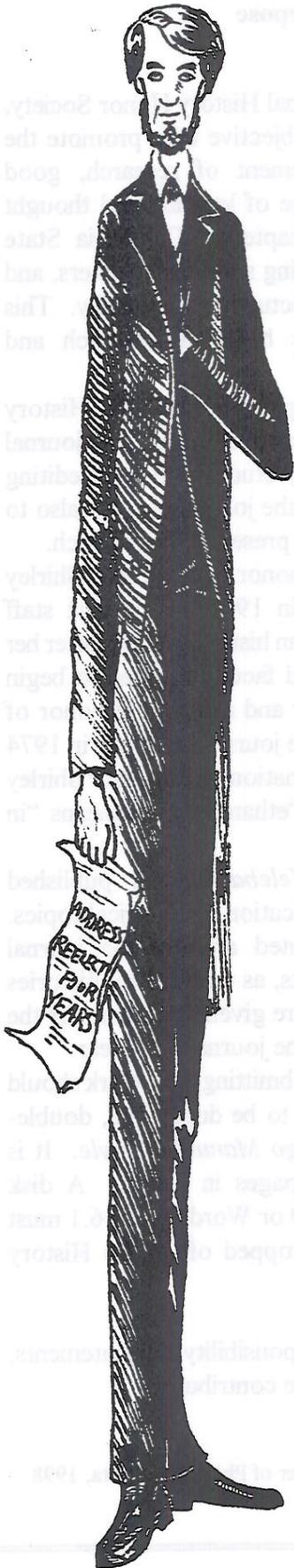
La République est le plus grand des biens que l'on puisse se procurer. Elle est le plus grand des maux que l'on puisse se procurer. Elle est le plus grand des biens que l'on puisse se procurer.

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Welebaethan 1998 Prize Winners

The Theta Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta awards four prizes each year for the best papers in that edition of the Welebaethan. The categories include: Best Overall Paper, Best United States History Paper, Best Western History Paper, and Best European History Paper. Winners are selected by an Awards Committee. The final edited versions are printed in this year's Welebaethan. A prize of \$100.00 is awarded to the Best Overall Paper; prizes of \$50.00 are awarded to the other three authors. The 1998 prize winners include:

Lawrence B. de Graaf Prize for Best Overall Paper:

Dana Blakemore and Kenneth Hough, "Port of Sin: The Legal Plight of Chinese Prostitutes in San Francisco"

William B. Langsdorf Prize in Western History:

Shenandoah Lynd, "The Huntington Beach Civic Center and the Politics of Location"

Prize in United States History:

Marla Peppers, "The Economic Exploitation of Black Women in the Antebellum South"

Ric Miller Prize in European History:

Paul Kendel: "The Rhetoric of Post-Colonial Theory"