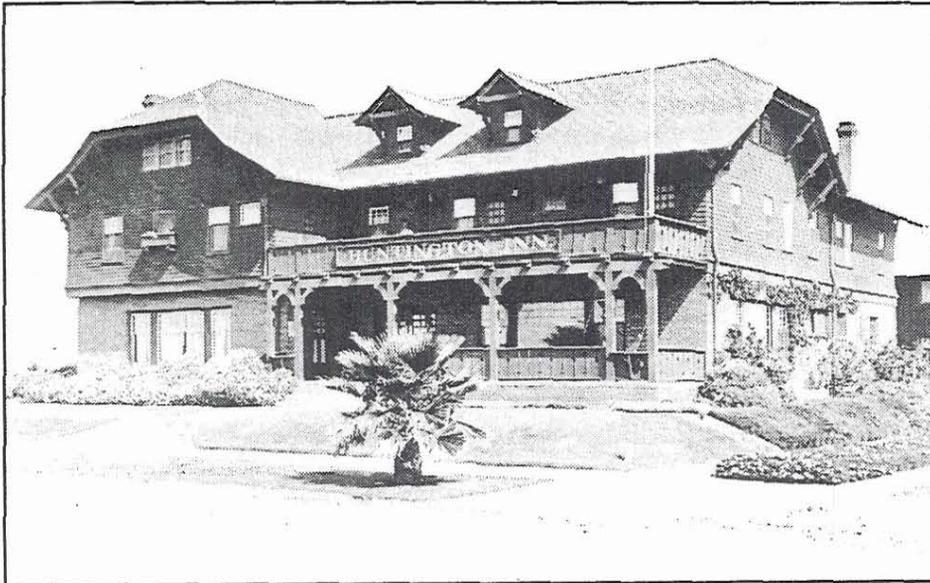


# Huntington Beach

KAYE H. MACLEOD AND BARBARA MILKOVICH



Courtesy of the Huntington Beach Historical Society

Located across the Pacific Coast Highway from the ocean, the Huntington Inn was popular with vacationers.



During the Spanish and Mexican periods, the area that included the future Huntington Beach was part of the great rancho granted to Manuel Nieto in 1784. Later, when this rancho was divided, the area was on the portion named Rancho Las Bolsas. Abel Stearns acquired the property in the 1860s and continued to use it for pasture land for his extensive cattle holdings.

When the first American settlers discovered that the beach below the prominent bluff had a vast deposit of shells, they gathered them as a poultry feed supplement. The beach was called Shell Beach for several years before urban development began.

During the 1870s and 1880s, the boundaries of the Rancho Las Bolsas and that of the Rancho Santa Ana de Santiago were challenged by settlers who felt that some of the land was not part of either rancho. Because ownership was risky until the dispute was finally settled, the area did not become legally inhabited as fast as other parts of what was to become Orange County. Squatters were a fact of life on marshy land. Because one of them, a preacher named Isaac Hickey, lived in the marshes southeast of the bluff, the area became known as Gospel Swamp.

Northwest of the bluff lay the Bolsa Chica, a salt water marsh. Southeast of it was the delta of the Santa Ana River. Because of special geological features, Huntington Beach is one of the richest oil fields in California and was the major discovery by Standard Oil in 1920.

JUL 25 1987

As early as the 1860s, the area had been opened to agriculture, and by the late 1870s the southeastern delta was called the "Egypt of America" because it was so fertile. Here rich crops of vegetables were grown, including celery, asparagus, peppers, corn, and potatoes. Barley was also an important crop that was grown on the mesa inland from the town.

Before the community of Huntington Beach was developed, Westminster was settled as a center for the agricultural region. However, Westminster never became the regional transportation center. The peat fields, while wonderful for celery cultivation, were too soft for railway building. The first railroad into the region, the Smeltzer branch of the Santa Ana-Newport Railroad, was constructed in 1897 from Newport along the coast to the edge of the bluff which became Huntington Beach. Turning inland toward Westminster, it was forced to stop five miles from the coast by virtually impassable peat bogs. This meant that in the early period it was Huntington Beach that developed as the transportation center for the region.

Huntington Beach was originally laid out on the top of the bluff, which was the largest area of high land along the coast between Long Beach and Newport Mesa. The first developers, Philip Stanton, John N. Anderson, and S.H. Finley, named their venture Pacific City. They hoped to establish a resort along the lines of Atlantic City in New Jersey. By 1902, some eighteen months after they began, they sold out to another group which included Henry Huntington, and the Pacific Electric railway was constructed along the bluff, linking the town with Long Beach.

Once the electric railroad was in operation, city boosters sought tourist traffic. They were fortunate to attract the Methodist Resort Association which accepted a gift of land to establish a camp in the center of town. This site, later called "Arbamar," became a popular location for meetings during the summer months. In addition to the Methodist Association annual camp meeting, the area served for fifteen years such diverse group meetings as the Grand Army of the Republic and the Socialist Party.

The city claims many prominent settlers during the pioneering years of coastal Orange County. William Newland, who developed much of the fine farm land in the Huntington Beach area and provided capital for numerous enterprises, was one of the very first to settle here in 1897. His home has been restored as a museum by the Huntington Beach Historical Society in tribute to the agricultural founders of the area. The Newland House is located at Beach Blvd. and Adams St. and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The city also boasts another National Register complex, the Helme-Worthy buildings. These are still in family hands and are located at Sixth and Walnut streets. They include a rare Western False Front commercial building (circa 1904) and an older farm house that was moved onto the site in 1903. The builder, Matthew Helme, was a furniture store owner and an early member of the Board of Trustees. Huntington Beach owes much of its municipal development to his concept of a modern city.

Other early settlers include Charles Warner, a member of the first Board of Trustees, whose home still stands at 10th and Walnut. His son Willis was a member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Out-

standing also was Tom Talbert, another member of the County Board of Supervisors and a long-time city booster. His memoirs represent the bulk of early history available about the coastal region. His residence was at Sixth St. and Pacific Coast Highway.

From the very beginning, the fledgling city capitalized on its vast stretch of beach as a recreation site. In fact, when the Huntington Beach Company took over the development in 1903, one of the first things they did was erect a long wooden pier out into the surf for fishing and strolling. The present concrete pier was dedicated in 1914 and has achieved world wide recognition as a fine surfing location. For a number of years the Ocean Pacific Surfing Championships have taken place here. Time and historically high surfs have taken their toll on the under-structure of this venerable pier, and plans are now being made to restore it.

Before the surfing event began, at least one other convention was a yearly activity. During the 1940s and 1950s there was a statewide convention of twins held at the pier and adjoining pavilion each fall. There were prizes for the best looking pair, the most lookalike, etc., etc. This, too, was quite popular. Over 300 pairs of twins took part in the 1955 festivities.

Huntington Beach developed early as an industrial area, utilizing the abundant raw materials around it. The first of the industrial sites was the Rainey Tile Co., which manufactured industrial pipe used to drain the agricultural fields of the region. It and another tile company, La Bolsa, were located northeast of town at a rich clay deposit near the railroad.

Huntington Beach's incorporation as a sixth class city in 1909 encouraged more industry to come into the corridor along the Southern Pacific/Electric tracks. As the sugar beet industry developed in Orange Coun-



Courtesy of the Huntington Beach Historical Society

Huntington Beach's first mayor, Ed Manning, and Councilman C.H. Howard ride in the Fourth-of-July Parade in 1909, the year the city was incorporated.

ty, Holly Sugar Co. built a major plant in that same area. A broom factory followed, drawn by abundant broom corn in Gospel Swamp. A linoleum factory rounded out the early industrial economy. These were eclipsed in 1920 with the discovery of oil on the Huntington Beach bluff. Within a few short years, six large oil fields were developed in the region. Huntington Beach came to be ranked among the six largest oil fields (in terms of production) in the United States.

Development was concentrated in agriculture and oil until the late 1950s. The city remained small until a period between 1957 and 1959 when a series of annexations increased the area under its jurisdiction by over twenty square miles including an area between the Santa Ana River and Warner Ave. These actions allowed Huntington Beach to capture a large portion of the residential construction boom which occurred in western Orange County in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This rapid growth gave Huntington Beach the distinction of being the fastest growing city in the nation during that time.

In 1963, the development of Huntington Harbour, a multi-million dollar project, turned swampland into a residential district of islands, channels, and yachting facilities. Another new arrival in the city during 1963 was the McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Space Systems Center. This facility and the Edison Generating Plant, constructed in 1956, brought many new residents to Huntington Beach.

Starting in the 1960s, cultural facilities and open space were emphasized through the efforts of both citizens and government. In 1968, the citizens approved a park bond by more than seventy percent of the vote. This provided for a 200-acre central park, two community centers, and many neighborhood parks.

The 1970s heralded the beginning of many needed facilities. In October, 1972, groundbreaking ceremonies were held for a new \$3 million library, designed by world famous architects Richard and Dion Neutra. The library was built on a hill overlooking one of several lakes. The city's new civic center complex at 2000 Main St. was designed by noted architect Kurt Meyer and completed in 1974.

In the decade of the 1980s, Huntington Beach adopted the slogan "City of Expanding Horizons" and embarked on an aggressive economic development and revitalization effort that includes a redevelopment program as one element. A current five-year plan for 1987-1992 summarizes the goals, objectives, and activities for two project areas. One is The Main Pier, an area which encompasses some 336 acres of residential, office-professional, retail, and visitor-serving land uses. The other is The Waterfront, a hotel complex on forty-five acres of land fronting the inland side of the Pacific Coast Highway, which will be the site for hotels, restaurants, shopping plazas, and residential land uses.

As a resort area, the city's nine miles of shoreline will continue to attract millions of beach enthusiasts annually. Huntington Beach has long been known as one of the world's great surfing areas, and plans are underway to establish the Huntington Beach International Surfing Museum. The future includes blending the historic character of the past with a viable economic future.

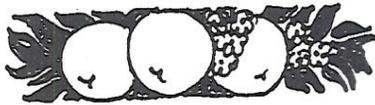
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# A HUNDRED YEARS OF YESTERDAYS:

A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF  
THE PEOPLE OF ORANGE COUNTY  
AND THEIR COMMUNITIES



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