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HUNTINGTON BEACH DISASTERS IN 1933

by Vicky Contreras

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Beach at least once a year. Even though these winds are often of considerable strength, there has never been a stronger storm than the gale that hit Huntington Beach in 1933.

It was Tuesday, January 10, 1933, when a dense fog rolled over the sleeping city of Huntington Beach. At eleven o' clock the fog was so thick it was impossible to see the distance of a car's length. After eleven o' clock, the fog rose swiftly to an even thicker density, followed by an ominous calm that pervaded the innocent and unsuspecting city and its citizens.

Suddenly, almost without any warning whatsoever, a blinding wind of slightly less intensity than a hurricane swept through the city at sixty to seventy miles an hour.

The damage to the city was large and irrevocable. Trees of various types and sizes, were brutally jerked loose from their roots and were knocked to the ground. Awnings were slashed to tattered ribbons, numerous telephone poles were knocked down. The

JANUARY GALE

Santa Ana winds are a very common occurrence in the city of Huntington Beach. These excessively dry, hot, dust-laden winds sweep through Huntington Beach at least once a year. Even though these winds are often of considerable strength, there has never been a stronger storm than the gale that hit Huntington Beach in 1933.

It was Tuesday, January 10, 1933, when a dense fog settled over the sleeping city of Huntington Beach. At eleven o' clock the fog was so thick it was impossible to see the distance of a car's length. After eleven o' clock, the fog rose swiftly to an even thicker density, followed by an ominous calm that pervaded the innocent and unsuspecting city and its citizens.

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Trees of various types and sizes, were brutally jerked loose from their roots and were knocked to the ground. Awnings were slashed to tattered ribbons, numerous telephone poles were knocked down. The

electric wires were jerked loose, plunging Huntington Beach and its inhabitants into a stygian darkness.

Even the timber wood oil derricks, rising an imperious hundred and twenty five feet tottered menacingly back and forth while their frightened but determined owners rushed out of their houses with almost useless lanterns which just barely pierced the night and made tiny pinpoints of light in the pitch blackness of midnight. These owners had to have many years of training and experience to protect their oil derricks from any harm that may come to them, but on the night of this furious and night-marish storm, their knowledge and skill was sorely tried as they stood there despairingly watching their precious oil derricks swaying dangerously from side to side, then crashing helplessly to the ground below, while others fell on top of one another knocking down all other derricks that were in their path.

Unfortunately, an unsuspecting sailor was swept off the gang plank and was violently thrown into the choppy sea below.

The next morning the people of Huntington Beach stepped outside to see the effects of the preceding night's storm. What they saw was indeed hard to believe. As they stood there, looking about

them with a mingled sense of fascination and horror, they saw uprooted trees lying around with many of their branches bare because the intense wind had stripped them of their leaves, telephone poles on the ground, the electric wires also lying around in the streets apt to trip anyone not watching out for them, and worst of all, oil derricks lying in crumpled heaps, causing quite a few oil spills, and unfortunately for the owners, they had almost no insurance coverage, making Mother Nature's little prank pretty expensive. The total loss from the oil derricks totaled two hundred thousand dollars.

Three of the oil companies that suffered large losses are still very popular today; Shell, Richfield (Arco), and Standard Oil Companies.

Orange County had a very big loss; the citrus crop alone was a seventy five thousand dollar loss.

Even though there was much damage and a very large amount of debris strewn all over the city, Huntington Beach citizens set to work, striving to clean up their city and restore it to its former beauty. (2:1)

EARTHQUAKE!

It was a nice, pleasant, seemingly innocent Friday, March 10, 1933 to be exact, just two months after the horrible gale that had hit the city of Huntington Beach in January. The people of Huntington Beach had totally regained their composure by now and were ready to face any further punishment Mother Nature chose to bestow on them, even though they did not expect, or have any desire for for that matter, any more demoniac hurricanes or some other type of natural disaster to ruin their precious city once again, for many months, or rather, many years to come. Every toughened citizen of Huntington Beach had filed their horrible experience under thrilling true gorrer stories to relate to their grandchildren someday, relieved that they had already endured the most horrifying experience that fate could ever ask anyone to have to go through in a whole lifetime. But the worst was yet to come.

At about five o' clock that evening, the citizens of Huntington Beach heard a low rumbling sound accompanied by a shaking sensation directly beneath their feet. Subtle at first, but increasing with every passing second to the point where dishes and knickknacks rattled violently, then came crashing down from shelves and mantelpieces sending their owners into

a state of frenzied horror as they panicked and rushed blindly into the streets, not able to understand why fate was being so cruel to them. As they stood there, out in the open, not really wanting to watch but having no choice, for they were rooted to the rapidly shifting ground, paralyzed and overwhelmed with terror, they watched their beloved city once again torn down into pitifully crumpled ruins.

Buildings everywhere crashed to the ground with an agonizing crumbling sound. The earthquake was now so intense, that some people were actually thrown from their feet because of the incredible force of the earthquake. A few people raced through the streets, dodging falling bricks and stumbling over all the debris already covering the streets, to see what the seismograph readings had recorded. When they arrived, left breathless from their dangerous journey, they watched transfixed, as the needle moved up and down to the seismograph's extreme limits.

Forty five seconds may not seem like a very long time to you and me right now, but forty five seconds would seem like an eternity when there are buildings crashing to the ground, and helpless and innocent people becoming trapped underneath falling pieces of brick and other types of dangerous debris.

Most people recovered quickly after the initial

shock, and gathered in frightened and stunned small groups sharing various experiences. (1:1)

The damage to the city was terrible and extensive. It was totaled to twenty five million dollars. (1:2)

There was damage done to almost all business houses and homes. Large parts of the elementary school walls were badly cracked, and in some places totally ruined. City Hall was so badly damaged that it was proclaimed unsafe and was vacated, therefore, the police and fire quarters had to be held on the front lawn. (1:1)

There was terrible damage done to the homes also. Valuable glassware was shattered, beautiful collections of old and expensive china were broken into smithereens, contents from the ever present medicine cabinets were dashed to the washbowls beneath. (1:1)

As if this was not enough, in one home, a heavy marble mantelpiece was loosened and was thrown all the way across the livingroom missing absolutely nothing in its path. It later took six men to carry the marble mantelpiece away. (1:2)

Grocery and drug stores found all of their stocks pitched into a messy number of piles of cans and broken bottles all over the floors. (1:1)

But even though all that may seem like enough, it was not all.

The pier cracked apart between the old and new sections, in some places pieces of the road three feet wide were pushed up out of the shakey and damaged concrete, in other places where the earth had been split open, water spouted from it for about five to ten minutes, dry springs started flowing, and wells that had been totally dry up until then were filled with clean sparkling water, and last but not least, a sixty five thousand barrel Standard Oil tank burst open, creating a giant loss. (1:2)

In spite of the incredibly strong force, the gas, light, telephone, and water facilities withstood the shock very well. (1:2)

The next couple of days were like pure merciless torture for the people of Huntington Beach. The hourly shocks made people unceasingly nervous, for with each tremor, light or strong alike, everyone expected the whole nightmare to start all over again. Some people desolately roamed the streets at night, while others packed their cars with plenty of gasoline and bedding and either drove away out of the danger zone, or slept in their cars at the curb in front of their demolished homes. (1:1)

Apparently, the initial shock of the earthquake was a little too much for some people to handle as these two cases show; At about nine o' clock Friday night, some wierdo with a cracked ceiling

drove from Huntington Beach boulevard yelling that a tidal wave was coming and warned everyone to go inland. The rumor spread even though the sea was calm, and people went to back country cities and towns. (1:2)

Another, very humorous case was that of a man who rushed out into the street during the earthquake and excitedly proclaimed, "All right, don't anybody get excited! Con't panic! You've got to stay calm like me." And in that way he ran all over the streets getting his little message across until finally one of his neighbors said, "All right, so why don't you just go back into your house and put your pants on!" (1:2)

The people were so worried about their relatives and friends living somewhere else, that a line of communication was set up with Long Beach and motor trips every two hours carried messages to relatives or brought Long Beach residents to relatives in Huntington Beach. The American Legion joined forces with the police, fire, and the street department to establish traffic control and mark off danger zones, and people formed congregations on front lawns.(1:1)

There were a few fairly violent shocks after the original earthquake, like one on Thursday March 16, and another one even stronger on Monday March 13 at five o' clock in the morning. This was the

most violent after shock Huntington Beach went through causing some damage. One thousand three hundred and thirty after shocks were recorded up to Tuesday. Seventy were severe. (1:2)

The fatal earthquake was not completely without warning, although the warning was strange and undefined. On Friday preceding the tremblor some fishermen off the mainland reported seeing some curious white scum and gaseous bubbles spouting up out of the ocean. Also, some pets sensed the danger and disappeared and did not return until all danger was past. (1:2)

Unfortunately the deaths totaled were one hundred and nineteen, and although most of them were caused by the physical effects of the earthquake, many of them were caused by heart failure. (1:2)

Though the citizens of Huntington Beach were left shaken from their experience, they quickly regained their poise and self control and valiantly began to clear the debris that lay strewn in a giant rubble all over the streets, but the residents of Huntington Beach discovered they were not alone in their efforts to restore their dear city to its normal state. There were many kind and hard working neighbors who were willing to help out in any way they could. (1:1)

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