

HUNTINGTON BEACH A PORTRAIT IN OIL AND WATER

BY ROBERT FARRAR

GREAT WAVES were rolling in gently from the blue Pacific. A seemingly endless expanse of clean white beach stretched as far as the eye could see. Two men stood there, sharing this lonely stretch of surf and sand with the seagulls and sandpipers. Attracted by the myriads of shells, which had given it the name Shell Beach, they stooped to gather some.

Stanton, turning to the other man, Col. S. H. Finley of Santa Ana, exclaimed: "What a combination we have here - perfect climate, a stretch of beach that's unsurpassed, high ground on which to build a town. Why this place has everything that Atlantic City has, and more too. Let's build a city here and call it Pacific City."

A city that would rival Atlantic City! Finley agreed. Just after the turn of the present century they formed the West Coast Land and Water Company, with Philip Ackley Stanton, founder of Seal Beach and Stanton and later Speaker of the California Legislature, as president, and Finley as engineer. The syndicate purchased 1,500 acres, laid out lots along the beach, and Pacific City was born.

The following year Stanton sold his interest at a profit to a group of Los Angeles-Long Beach businessmen. For the next two years progress was slow. The new owners soon found that transportation was the key to the further development of Stanton's dream. The people of Los Angeles must have a way to get to their "wonderland by the sea." Fortunately, this was just at the time that Henry E. Huntington was building his massive interurban transit system called the Pacific Electric Railway. But Huntington was cagey. The option to buy a large block of the company's stock at a mere 17¢ a share was not enough. Appealing to his vanity, the president of the company proposed: "Henry now would you like to have us change

the name of this town to Huntington Beach in your honor?" Huntington was converted, and Pacific City became Huntington Beach.

The completion of the Pacific Electric produced great excitement. July 4, 1904 witnessed the dedication of the new community, with patriotic speeches, fireworks, and a parade with the "big red cars," as the P. E. trolleys were called, leading the procession.

Advertising the townsite as a "city of destiny," the Huntington Beach Company set to work in earnest. It built the first wooden pier. It encouraged the development of Huntington Beach as a convention center by donating land, and local residents raised \$10,000 to build a big red "tabernacle," seating 3,000. Around it in a grove of eucalyptus trees rose a "tent city," sheltering thousands of summer visitors attracted here for the revival services led by prominent evangelists of the day. Others filled Tent City to capacity, too - the annual convention of the Grand Army of the Republic, with weeklong patriotic programs and parades.

The Pacific Electric joined in the publicity campaign. Attractive brochures rhapsodized upon the city as "Huntington Beach the peerless... shipping point for an extensive and agricultural county at its back... the climate here is Nature's smile."

Even encyclopedia salesmen joined in pushing the new city. The Encyclopedia Britannica bought 35 acres of land, cut it up into lots, and gave one to each purchaser of a set of encyclopedias. The salesmen worked hard and fast. They soon made enough sales to enable them to give away all of the 420 lots except 5!

A real boom had resulted. Lots skyrocketed in value. More land was added to the original townsite. Trees planted on every street made it the

"city beautiful." Industry came with the gigantic factory of the Holly Sugar Company. The voters approved a bond issue for the construction of a modern concrete pier. Dedicated in 1914, the program described it as "the longest, highest, and only solid concrete municipal pier in the United States." Hear the comments of Tom Talbert, now 88 years old and a well-known pioneer of this area: "We had a real battle putting that pier in. There was resistance from the folks who said the city could not swing the required \$70,000 bond issue. They peppered the town with handbills condemning the pier idea, but we finally won out... If that pier were built today, it would take a cool million easily."

With the completion of the pier, Huntington Beach had at last acquired a distinctive personality as a serene seaside community where visitors and residents could fish, swim, or just bask in the sun - its prime asset the majestic stretch of surf and sand.

Then came an explosive force that changed the whole course of Huntington Beach history - the discovery of oil.

The story reads like a fairy tale. When Holly Sugar came in 1911, they drilled wells to get water for cleaning the sugar beets. So much gas appeared in the wells that water could not be pumped successfully until it came back up to higher strata. Talbert, discussing this problem with C. A. Johnson, General Manager for Holly, insisted: "I believe we have oil here!" Others doubted. Delay in drilling resulted. Nine years later Standard Oil Company on the west slope of Reservoir Hill brought into production the first well, today appropriately marked with a plaque reading, "Discovery Well - Huntington Beach Field."

This was the herald of a new era. The following November, a few Huntington Beach residents can still recall the roaring and shrieking when

the gusher, Bolsa Chica Number One, blew in, spouting gas and oil with unbelievable force. Huge crowds gathered while 500 men fought to control the flow as the well released 2,000 barrels of oil and more than 4,000,000 cubic feet of gas daily. The excitement was so great that the authorities even dismissed school so that the children could see the sight!

Bolsa Chica No. 1 was the forerunner of vast additional drillings which have made Huntington Beach the third largest oil field in California, with 1964 production from 1,776 wells of 16,095,564 barrels. So great was its fame that it changed the whole course of a seaside community. Henceforth, oil and water would mix to build a mighty city.

Overnight Huntington Beach became an oil boom town. Within a few days the population doubled. Built to a fever pitch by Southern California newspaper and national advertising, people from all parts of the country began the trek for "black gold." The once quiet city was seething with excitement. Scores of corporations were formed and their stocks put on the market. The old established oil companies drilled more and more wells. Even some of the small companies made fantastic profits. Each owner of an "encyclopedia lot," supposedly worthless by now, received an income of \$100 a month!

The big bonanza continued for several years. Then excitement died down, only to flare again in 1926 with the discovery of a vast deposit of oil in the residential district. Hundreds of homes and apartments were torn down to make way for the towering derricks. Oil fever hit again 29 years later, except that improved machinery replaced the older methods of drilling and pumping. Meanwhile, two Huntington Beach men, H. H. McVicar and "Doc" Rood, perfected the whipstock method. Their first well, the "Vicaroo," inaugurated the hunt for undersea oil. Today some 500 whipstock wells drill at such an angle as to reach the fabulously rich offshore oil, known as the tidelands pool, tapping a basin 12,183 feet below the water.

Despite the glamour of oil and the excitement which came in its wake, Huntington Beach remained a small town. Proud of its incomparable beach, it preferred to be known as the "seaside community"—but not

for long. Powerful forces were at work. World War II wrought far-reaching changes in Southern California—burgeoning population, mushrooming industries, freeways. Buena Park, Anaheim, and other Orange County cities felt the impact first. Huntington Beach sat on the sidelines, still slumbering. Then came the explosion. And what an explosion it was, affecting Huntington Beach even more profoundly than that day in November, 1920, when Bolsa Chica No. 1 came roaring in.

Since 1957 Huntington Beach has been one continuous success story—the Miracle City. A phenomenal course of annexation growth took in enough surrounding territory to increase its land area six times. Southern California Edison built an automated steam-electric station capable of generating enough electricity to serve a million people. Huntington Harbour Corporation converted 900 acres of tidal wasteland into a plush residential-marine community, while Huntington Beach Company is literally revolutionizing the face of the community with the new magic of its architectural planning. A luxury hotel, motel and convention center; a great regional shopping complex; the opening of Golden West College—all attest to meteoric growth. Douglas Space Systems Center, presently building the S-IVB stage of the huge Saturn lunar rocket, occupies a 245-acre complex of tremendous buildings and employs more than 4,000. Envisioned for the immediate future is a gigantic \$444,000,000 off-shore nuclear desalting plant. And this is only the beginning!

Huntington Beach today is the largest coastal city between Long Beach and San Diego, already within sight of 100,000 population; with a quarter of a million soon, perhaps by 1975.

The sleepy village by the sea has disappeared forever. In its place has risen a metropolis bursting with energy, standing at the threshold of an even greater destiny.

Robert M. Lambert was right when as Mayor in 1963 he declared: "We have hardly tapped our resources or our potential as yet," and he might have added, "the two magic resources on which that potential rests are the water of the mighty Pacific and the black gold of oil."

Huntington Beach is proof that oil and water do mix!

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