

Outside of a depression, an earthquake, gale-force winds, and a war—the years from 1930 to 1955 in Huntington Beach were, believe it or not...



The Quiet Years

Part IV
in *The Growth of a City* series
looks at twenty-five years in the city's history

I T WAS 1930 AND "HARD TIMES" HAD COME TO HUNTINGTON

Beach. The Stock Market crash of 1929 sent the price of oil down to one-half of the pre-depression value, and production was cut back to its lowest level since 1921.

Forty-five local men registered as unemployed at the Chamber of Commerce employment bureau. One, a resident of Huntington Beach for 15 years accustomed to a salary of \$250 per month, was ready to take up a pick and shovel. Sirloin steaks were being advertised at 22¢ per pound and a free pound of sauerkraut was available to customers willing to pay 20¢ for a pound of weiners.

Newspapers carried the headline "Ole Man Winter and His Son Hard Times Due for Good Licking," as President Hoover announced his plans for national development projects as a means for providing jobs. The City Council of Huntington Beach voted to spend \$125,000 on pier, playground and pavillion improvements. And the Huntington Beach Company spent an additional \$25,000 on new improvements for free public use at the beach.

By the close of 1930, hope was returning to the small beach community. The \$150,000 for improvements created new jobs and it was thought that new developers and investors would be attracted to the area. The Huntington Beach Chamber of Commerce and Business Men's Association joined together in planning an outdoor Christmas to spread cheer to the entire city.

But the hope was short-lived. As the nation's

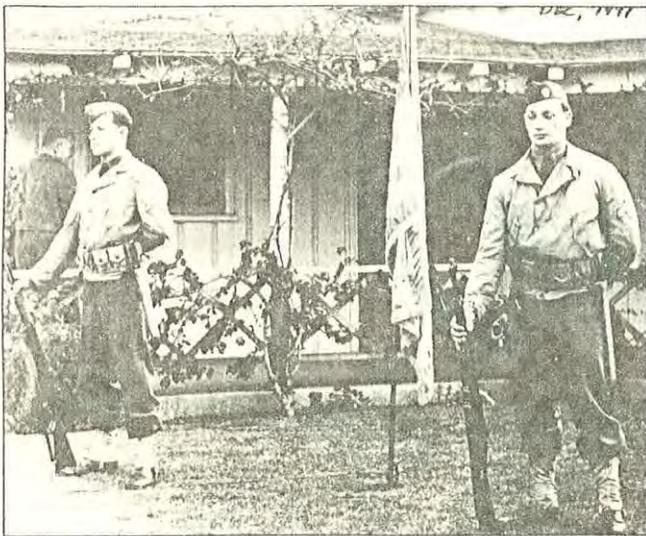


economy worsened, dissatisfaction grew. Heavy voting in the 1932 Presidential election rolled up a record count in the city's history. The "Huntington Beach News" held an open house on election night and posted election results on window bulletins. By midnight it became apparent that Huntington Beach had joined the rest of the country in the Democratic landslide—the first time in the city's history that a majority of Democratic votes were cast in a general election.

On January 10, 1933 a dense fog settled over Huntington Beach and an ominous calm pervaded the community. Without warning, gale winds between 60-70 MPH swept through

*Photo taken
March 3, 1931
from the beach
between Main and
Fifth Sts. showing
Dance Hall,
Pavillion, and a
portion of the
Concession
Building*

the city. Trees were uprooted, and awnings were slashed to ribbons. Telephone poles were knocked down, jerking electric wires loose. Huntington Beach was plunged into darkness. One hundred and twenty-five foot timber oil derricks fell to the ground like match sticks. Total loss from the derricks alone was



Lake Park Clubhouse taken over by the Army in December, 1941 at the start of World War II.

\$200,000. Citizens set to work to clean up the debris, but Mother Nature had more in store for the coastal community.

Two months later, Huntington Beach was severely shaken by the "Long Beach" earthquake. The tremors lasted only 45 seconds, but long-time residents claim it felt more like 45 minutes. People ran into the middle of Main Street to watch as some of the buildings and roofs collapsed. City Hall was declared unsafe and had to be vacated. Central Elementary School (Dwyer Jr. High School today) was badly damaged and all concurred that had the quake taken place during school hours, many lives would have been lost.

According to the "Huntington Beach News", people were afraid to be in their houses. They either walked the streets all night or slept in their cars on vacant lots. Property loss was estimated at \$25 million, and aftershocks were felt for two years.

All was not lost in 1933. Harold McVicar, a petroleum geologist, thought there was oil under the ocean at Huntington Beach. He invented the whipstock, which was a method of drilling on the land and bending a pipe underneath the ocean (termed slant drilling). Drilling began at 22nd and Walnut Streets, and within three months, drilling activity was high again from the new discoveries on the ocean floor.

Men who drilled during the 1933 oil boom didn't have money to pay their crew. So they paid a portion in scrip or part of the oil production. Most oil workers couldn't afford to keep the scrip, so they sold it for less than 50¢ on the dollar. Those who hung on made money when the wells produced. Some of the crew that held onto the scrip still have an interest in the

wells today, and wouldn't consider selling.

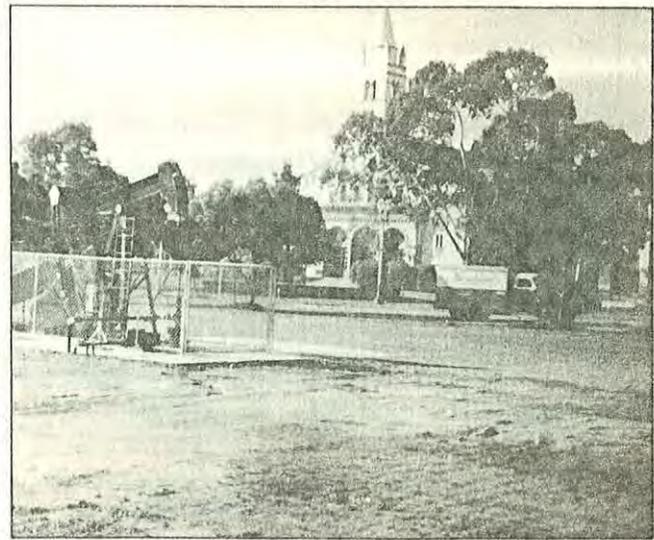
The remainder of the decade was quiet. Population grew from 3,690 in 1930 to only 3,738 in 1940; oil production stabilized; new fire equipment was purchased reducing fire liability.

THE FORTIES BROUGHT WAR. A WAR THE U.S. AND ITS ALLIES WON IN large part with oil—and Huntington Beach became the largest oil producer in the state. Because of the importance of oil, gun placements were mounted off the bluffs to protect the city and its oilfields from attack.

A Civil Defense group was formed and first aid was taught along with plane spotting and bomb disposal. Some members tried to keep the Civil Defense group active after the war was over, but there just wasn't very much interest in it after peace was declared.

Many returning Huntington Beach veterans did not want to give up flying. The Meadowlark Airport was started in 1946 for their use and enjoyment. When the airport was first built, it was surrounded by bean fields. The original runway was made out of dirt and wind socks showed the direction of the wind.

Little was written about Huntington Beach during the 15 years following the war. By 1953, population gradually increased to almost 6,000



as veterans and city dwellers began migrating to suburban Orange County. It was the birth of television and many would-be Mr. Blandings began building their dream houses.

Compensation for City Council members remained at the 1928 level of \$50 per month. The city annexed an additional 1.14 sq. miles, bringing Huntington Beach to a total city limits of 4.71 sq. miles.

The real growth of the city was just beginning.

Looking across Main Street at the High School Tower from land where the Civic Center stands today.