

HISTORICAL

SUNSET BEACH

at Huntington Beach, California

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WALKING TOUR



It's the California beach community most people still dream about, locals and tourists alike. It's the funky, uncluttered, historic, well-worn enclave that still feels like one of the coast's best-kept secrets. Because it is. Tucked within Huntington Beach next to Seal Beach, Sunset Beach is a perfectly protected pocket of everything that has made the California dream so magical over the years; interesting shops, restaurants, bars and layers of local lore. From wild tales of Prohibition-era rum running to the complex network of coastal duck-hunting lodges to the old red car that used to rumble through town, there are still plenty of traces of the past that you can discover. So park the car and get ready to wander and enjoy one of coastal Southern California's truly hidden gems.

GET STARTED: *Park in the parking lot off Warner and Pacific Coast Highway at one end of the Green Belt. The tour weaves its way North, across PCH onto Sunset Island at one point, and ends 1.2 miles at the Water Tower.*

SUNSET BEACH HISTORY



Where does this quaint little beach story begin? Sunset Beach was subdivided and the map approved on September 6, 1904. A syndicate then purchased the property and lots were sold under the name Sunset Land and Water Company.

In 1905, it was a different world. There were no roads. The only way to get to and from Sunset Beach was the Pacific Electric Railway, which rumbled down the center of Sunset Beach. Brochures were printed and distributed to real estate offices in Los Angeles stating the fine points of Sunset Beach: still water for boating, beaches and surf, drinking water from artesian wells and lots selling at a price range of \$250 to \$700. This campaign was quite successful and about 30 houses were started the following year.



Around 1908, Sunset Drive was deeded to the County and a series of dirt roads were built around the beach areas, but they were impassable by cars. A County plan to improve the roads was halted by the United States entering World War I.

Duck hunting was very popular in and around Sunset Beach. The area was thick with bogs, wetlands and other environments conducive to duck hunting. Several homes were originally built to house duck hunters, including the present Captain Jack's Restaurant, one of the most iconic structures in town.

Then there was the rough and tumble world of Prohibition, which certainly helped shape and develop the history of Sunset Beach. Bootleg liquor was brought in by boat to Sunset Island. Several homes served as drop off points. The illegal alcohol was then transported to thirsty people inland.

One profound event in the history of Sunset Beach was the devastating 1933 Long Beach earthquake. Nature once again reared her head in September of 1939, affecting the area in the form of a hurricane, which moved up the coast from Baja, California and destroyed the Huntington Beach pier.

When the Navy decided that all homes had to be removed from the Anaheim Landing area to make room for the Naval Weapons Depot constructed during World War II, several were purchased and moved to Sunset Beach. At least three on Sunset Island are still intact and used as residences. The next big event in the history of Sunset Beach was World War II from December of 1941 to August of 1945. There was fear that Japanese submarines and airplanes would attack the Coast. Black-outs were enforced by air raid wardens who were chosen for each block. One night, anti-aircraft guns were shot from Douglas Aircraft (now Boeing) in Long Beach at what people thought were Japanese planes coming to drop bombs, although none were ever seen. Shrapnel from the shells fell in Sunset Beach but no one was injured.

The iconic Pacific Electric red cars stopped running in 1950 and the tracks abandoned. Residents marked off parking spaces in the sand of the right of way. Some people put up lines for drying their washed clothing. The community reclaimed the route as a green belt park.

A developer gained permission to start building condominiums on the right of way and some foundations were actually poured near Broadway. Donald Strain, who lived on North Pacific & 26th Street, obtained a restraining order and managed to stop the developer and save the right of way for the beautiful green belt park that visitors and residents now enjoy.

In 1983, a major flood occurred due to the convergence of extreme high tides, a powerful winter storm with high winds and runoff coming from inland. A couple of adventurous souls even rowed kayaks on Pacific Coast Highway.

On August 22, 2011, the City of Huntington Beach annexed the previously unincorporated County area of Sunset Beach, including the beach and Green Belt.



SUNSET BEACH



OLD LOOKOUT HOUSE
17200 South Pacific Avenue

The first home south of Warner on the oceanfront was built in 1938. It was a Coast Guard lookout used during World War II to search for submarines off the coast. Interestingly, the tower is attached by cables to keep it in place. After the war it was sold and has since been used as a residence. **Directions:** Right on 3rd St. and on the left.



KING NEPTUNE'S RESTAURANT,
17115 Pacific Coast Highway

King Neptune's began as Barney's Beanery in 1920. Barney was known to go duck hunting to get the "secret ingredient" for his chili beans. The restaurant was re-named King Neptune's in 1969. The décor of the restaurant is a mix of old military memorabilia, nautical antiques and much more. There are concrete squares outside with signatures from Miss Americas and Miss Universes from the 50's and 60's - "International Beauty Congress Walk." **Directions:** Back to Green Belt.

THIS PLACE IS AS DIVEY AS THEY COME, AND FEATURES A GUY NAMED FATHER WHO LETS PEOPLE SLEEP ON HIS COUCH FOR FREE—THE COUCH IS SO FAMOUS IT EVEN HAS A FACEBOOK PAGE IN ITS HONOR.



FOURTH STREET TOWERS
17122 North Pacific Avenue

This house was constructed in 1912 with wood salvaged from a 40 year old dredge. Plumbing was finally installed in 1955 and a telephone in 1979. Currently, it has a mural, inspired by locals, painted by Neill Ketchum on the garage door. **Directions:** Right on 4th Street and on the left.

PHOTO OP! THE PEOPLE IN THE MURALS ARE BASED ON SUNSET BEACH LOCALS. CAN YOU GUESS WHICH IS THE ARTIST?



PORTER HOUSE
17121 4th Street

Built around 1905 as a model home, this house was originally located on the oceanfront. During the hurricane of 1939, the house washed off its oceanfront location onto the Pacific Electric tracks (now the greenbelt). The owners then moved it to its present location in order to build a larger home on the oceanfront. The Porters rented until 1968 when they purchased it from a trust. **Directions:** Back to Green Belt.



LITTLE YELLOW HOUSE
16908 North Pacific Avenue

In 1912 Henry Pierce was given 26 lots in Sunset Beach as back pay from the municipal water district which had gone bankrupt. In 1913 he and his brother built four little cabins on land between 9th and 10th Street. Two were eventually combined into one house and remain today. The cottages were built of clear cut, old growth redwood, using old fashioned single board construction; a classic California construction element. **Directions:** Right between 10th and 11th Streets at the large rock, left on PCH.

THIS LARGE ROCK FELL OFF THE RED CAR ON IT'S WAY TO THE HB/NEWPORT RIVER JETTY CONSTRUCTION.



POST OFFICE
16885 Pacific Coast Highway

The Post Office was previously located on 16th Street and Pacific Coast Highway where today there is a preschool. Local resident Dick Moody built the new Post Office in 1945. It had room at one end for a small malt shop called "Bill's Burgers". Eventually the Post Office needed more room and took over that space. Residents of Sunset Beach do not get home mail delivery and prefer to meet and greet each other daily at the Post Office. **Directions:** Back to Green Belt.



7
DIANE'S GARDEN HOME
16875 North Pacific Avenue
Built in 1920 as a duck hunter's cabin, Sunset Beach postmistress Mabel Galle purchased it in 1944 for \$1250. In 1960 her daughter and family, the Pridgeons, moved in to help care for her. A garage and upstairs were later added. Mabel's granddaughter still lives in the home, and so a family legacy continues. **Directions:** Continue on Green Belt.



8
THE SUNSET BEACH COMMUNITY CENTER
16861 12th Street (Former Fire Station 3)
In 1948 the community of Sunset Beach started a Volunteer Fire Crew. Resident Anna Filiton, in 1949, sold this lot to the Orange County Fire Department for \$10 to build a fire station. The Volunteer Fire Crew responded to about 200 calls per year for 60 years. Note the plaque in front, and in the back, see the siren that alerted our firefighters. The building is now used as a part of our Community Center, and a tile wall honors notable locals.



THE SUNSET BEACH COMMUNITY TILE WALL
16861 12th Street
Created in an effort to raise funds for the Sunset Beach 100th Year Anniversary celebration, the Sunset Beach Community Tile Wall represents the community's love for family, pets, friends, homes, businesses and cherished landmarks. These hand-painted ceramic tiles were designed by residents to express their passion for the past, present and future of Sunset Beach. **Directions:** Cross PCH at Broadway and turn left.

BEFORE CROSSING PCH FOR THE NEXT PART OF THE TOUR, STOP AT ANTIQUES OF THE SEA FOR SUNSET BEACH INSPIRED ANTIQUES.

SUNSET ISLAND



9
CAPTAIN JACK'S RESTAURANT
Broadway and Pacific Coast Highway
Built in 1925 by the Gunn family, it was originally rented out as bachelor quarters for duck hunters. In 1965, surfing legend Jack Haley (who won the first ever US Open of Surfing in 1959) purchased the property and it became the popular restaurant, Captain Jack's. An employer of many of our town's youth, it's common to see famous athletes, celebrities and politicians enjoying a dinner there. Captain Jack's is the only restaurant in Sunset Beach accessible by boat. **Directions:** Left on Bayview Drive



10
NOREK-GUNN HOUSE
16815 Bayview Drive (Corner of Broadway)
The original home here was declared unsafe and had to be demolished. As a training exercise, the Sunset Beach Fire Department burned it down. The present house was built in 1967. In the twenties bootleggers are said to have unloaded their cargo at the original house on this site. **Directions:** Continue North on Bayview Drive.



11
THE BRADY'S HOUSE
16731 Bayview Drive
Known as one of the original duck hunting lodges, the building materials for this structure were barged on to the island in 1930. The bottom level originally had a dirt floor with a pulley and tracks leading from the water to the street side. It also had an opening in the bulkhead where boats could enter and unload. It was used by rumrunners during Prohibition. **Directions:** Continue North on Bayview Drive.



12
FARIS COTTAGE
16692 Bayview Drive
Built circa 1927 as either an overflow duck hunting lodge, or by the Shade family as an overflow family retreat, this structure originally had a long wooden dock over the marsh to the water. This house is one of the first on Sunset Island and has a huge enclosed garden. **Directions:** Go South on Bayview Drive.



13
CASLIN'S "ORIGINAL" CASTLE
16762 Bayview Drive
Built in 1924 as one of the Sunset Beach Duck Clubs, the building materials were brought over to the Island by row boats. The house was used to store illegal liquor during Prohibition. How do we know? A large number of bottles were found under it during a renovation. **Directions:** Continue South on Bayview Drive.

A BRICK AND STONE FIREPLACE, WHICH STILL EXISTS, WAS ORIGINALLY USED FOR COOKING.



14
SUNSET BEACH WOMAN'S CLUB
16812 Bayview Drive
Twelve hard working women founded this Club in 1929. After earning \$250 through turkey raffles, card parties and other homegrown events, they purchased the lot and building where the Club now stands, for \$1,050. Later the building was enlarged and improved. Before being sold and moved. In 1948 the SBWC purchased an Army surplus medical building for \$1,000 which is what you see today. **Directions:** Cross PCH at Broadway and turn right.



15
OCEANSIDE INN
16711 Pacific Coast Highway
Built in 1931 on land purchased by the Phillips' in 1929, it was originally called the Sunset Motor Inn. About 1952 the name was changed to Oceanside Motel and then to Oceanside Inn. Although the units are small, most are residents who live there on a permanent basis. **Directions:** Continue North on PCH.



16
MOTHER'S BAR
16701 Pacific Coast Highway
This historic bright red building, located right next to a bright red barbershop, was built in 1924 and was once the ticket office for the Pacific Electric Cars. It has also been a bakery, a real estate office, a speakeasy camouflaged as a coffee shop during Prohibition, a bait shop and now a bar. Part of its charm include dollar bills, bras and underwear suspended overhead, and the coldest beer in town (they serve just beer and wine). The ultimate dive bar. **Directions:** Back to Green Belt.

IT GOT ITS CURRENT NAME FROM A LATE 1950'S TV SERIES "THE PETER GUNN SHOW" WHICH WAS SUPPOSEDLY FILMED AT THIS LOCATION.



17
KILLIAN'S BEACH HOUSE
16681 South Pacific Avenue
This house was built in 1908 for \$2280 and revamped after the 1933 earthquake. The original wood foundation was replaced with concrete blocks in 1966. **Directions:** Continue on Green Belt.



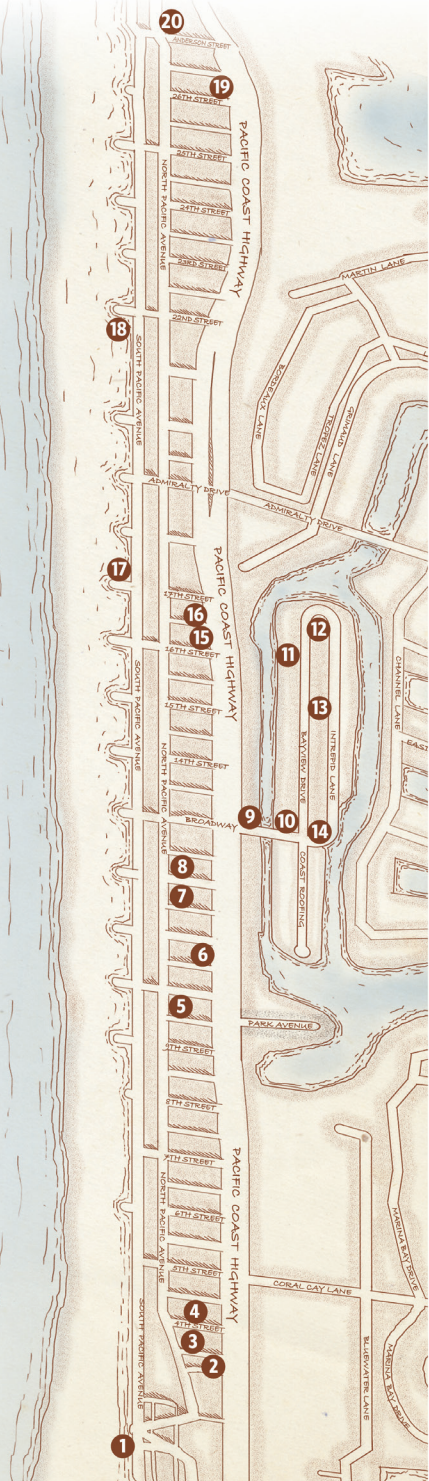
18
THE DUGOUT
16545 South Pacific Avenue
Originally built in 1917, this house was purchased in 1936 for \$2,000. The deed read that you could shoot ducks from the front porch since duck hunting was allowed on the beach back then. During Prohibition, illegal booze was brought in from the beach side and unloaded into the garage. It got its name "The Dugout" when all the sand was removed from under it to install a new foundation. **Directions:** Right on 26th St. Left on PCH.



19
HARBOR HOUSE CAFE
16341 Pacific Coast Highway
The original structure was built in 1924 and called Mary's Café. It later became a garden patio and art gallery before the current owner purchased it in 1975 and returned the building to its restaurant roots. Open 24 hours a day, visitors enjoy the old movie posters that cover the walls of the Harbor House Café. Will work for food? The "Superman" painting now gracing the exterior was painted by an artist in exchange for a meal. **Directions:** Back to Green Belt.

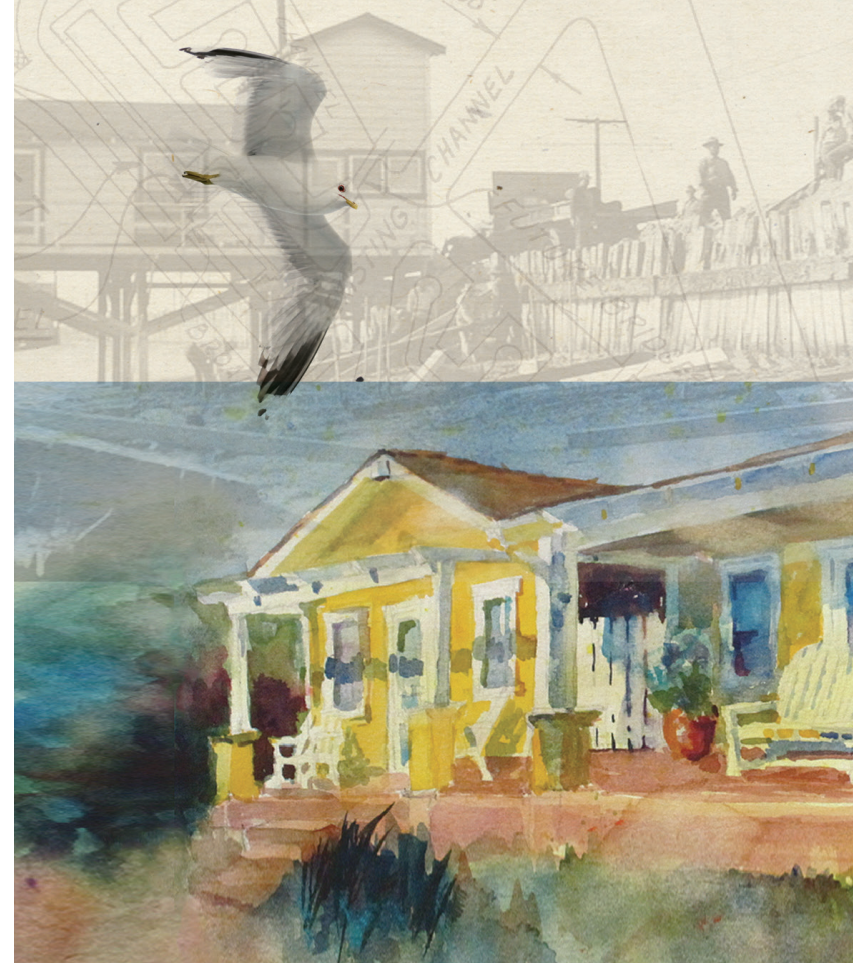


20
WATER TOWER
1 Anderson Street
Originally an 87-foot water tower built around 1890 was replaced in 1940 with this 75,000 gallon redwood tank, the largest ever built on the West Coast. When the tower became obsolete, a three-year public debate raged over what to do with this historic structure. Eventually in 1984 the California Coastal Commission approved making it into a residence. The 360 degree view of the Pacific and San Gabriel Mountains from the tower house is spectacular. It boasts three bedrooms, four bathrooms, commercial grade elevator and a two-car garage. It is offered for weekly rental and also includes an aquarium, Jacuzzi and wine cellar.



SUNSET BEACH. It's a throwback.

A place where people pick up their own mail. Where life moves slower and where charming little surprises appear to wait behind each cozy corner. And where history greets almost every step. Thank you for taking the time to explore. We hope you come back soon.



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Special thanks to the Sunset Beach Community Association. Photos courtesy of local photographer Lawrence Crandall and copy edited by local writer Chris Epting. Featuring paintings by local artist Bill Anderson. **NOTE:** Please do not disturb residents of the historic homes.

