

History parades by house on hill

By Roger Bloom
Staff writer

HUNTINGTON BEACH — Tucked away in a new shopping center at one of the busiest intersections in Huntington Beach, the stately Newland House commands a view of the broad expanse of coastal Huntington Beach to the sea about a mile and a half away.

The vista now is one of houses, stores, apartment buildings, warehouses and streets spread out in an arc of civilization from the Edison power plant in the southeast to the Aminoil production fields in the west, with platform Emmy standing above the waves a mile beyond. Often, one or two oil tankers can be seen anchored offshore, unloading their gooey cargo into a pipeline running onshore to storage facilities near the Edison plant.

It is a vastly different landscape than what could have been seen in the Newland House's early days, before the incorporation of Huntington Beach.

Then, in 1898, the view from the mesa would have been of bean and barley fields interspersed with coastal marshland and cut through by a few dirt roads

linking the Newland family farmhouse with the town of Santa Ana and other farms and cattle ranches to the east and north.

The Newlands, William and Mary, had purchased 500 acres on and around the mesa in 1897 and paid carpenters \$2.50 per day to build a home for their family, which was eventually to include 10 children.

William Newland had to clear the bottom land below the mesa, which was then an overgrown peat bog. That done, he made a success of growing celery, sugar beets, lima beans and barley.

Change was in the air even back in those early days, and the Newlands, like many people still, dreamed of great things for the area.

In 1901, William Newland and some other local farmers and businessmen formed the West Coast Land and Water Company and purchased 40 acres of coastal land at what was then called Shell Beach. They began a new town and christened it Pacific City in the hope and expectation that it would soon grow to become the

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Newland: historic panorama

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Atlantic City of the West Coast.

That was not to be — the West Coast Land and Water Company sold out to Los Angeles businessmen in 1903 — but the new town did soon get a major shot in the arm when the Pacific Electric Railway decided to extend a line from LA to Pacific City. In a festive ceremony on July 4, 1904, that featured the first Fourth of July Parade, the line was christened and the town changed its name to Huntington Beach to honor Henry Huntington, the owner of the railroad that was to bring prosperity to the area.

Five years later, on Feb. 17, 1909, the City of Huntington Beach was incorporated — 915 people living on 3.57 square miles of coastal Orange County.

Meanwhile, the Newland farm had become a successful one, and in addition to the cash crops there were vegetable gardens and orchards, chickens, turkeys, goats, horses and even pet peacocks. There were barns, stables and bunkhouses for the farmhands, who numbered up to 50 men at times.

William Newland started the first bank in the town and its first newspaper. He was instrumental in getting the state to run Pacific Coast Highway south from Long Beach to Dana Point.

Mary Newland was one of the most active of the

Diamond memories

early pioneer women in the area, working with her husband to start the first grammar school and high school in town. She served for 16 years on the elementary school board and 18 years on the high school board. She founded the PTA, and was one of the founders of the Women's Club.

All the while she was raising a family of ten children, cooking for the dozens of farmhands and helping her husband with the business end of the farm.

For the Newlands, as for most of the people of the time, it was a life of hard work from sunup to sunset. But even back then, Huntington Beach began to exploit its potential as a recreational center. While it never became Atlantic City-West, it soon became something of a local resort.

In 1910 a bath house and salt water plunge (diving pool) was built on the beach by the Huntington Beach Company, the successor to West Coast Land and Water.

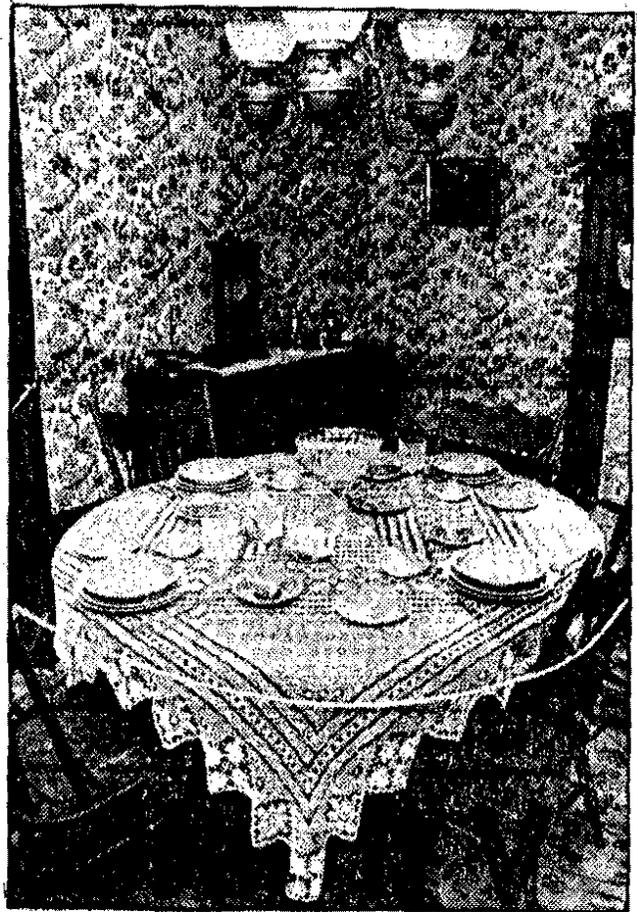
In 1914, a \$70,000 bond issue for the construction





LANDMARK HOME — The historic Newland House (above) preserves a Huntington Beach from another era. Within its walls are rooms of beautifully restored to their original grace, including this dining room (right).

Staff photos by Roger Bloom



of a concrete pier was approved and the new pier was in place by June of that year.

Fourth of July celebrations were held each year, drawing thousands from all over Southern California.

Before there were any hotels in the area, notable visitors would often stay in the Newland's guest bedroom. Mark Twain and P. T. Barnum spent some time in the house during these years, as did Henry Huntington and James Irvine. At one point a Navajo Indian chief was a guest at the house, helping Mary Newland to classify and catalogue her extensive collection of Indian baskets, which is now at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana.

During those early years, Huntington Beach also became a center for religious revival meetings. Many groups would hold these combinations of religious services and celebrations and worshippers would gather from miles around into campgrounds on the east side of town, surrounding an auditorium that was built in 1905 to house the meetings. The area became known as "Tent City" or "Gospel Swamp" and was semi-permanent as the revival meetings would sometimes stretch over days or weeks.

The discovery of oil in 1920 changed the complexion of the town overnight. In the 20s and 30s it was a boomtown, home to roustabouts and land speculators. After World War II, the city expanded, slowly at first and then exploding in the 60s, as part of the general boom in Southern California during that time.

William Newland died in 1933 and Mary took over operation of the farm. She continued the business successfully well into her eighties. In 1952, she died,

and the house was leased to Signal Oil Company. For 20 years it was home to a string of local Signal executives.

In 1972, the house was turned over to the city, which let it fall into disrepair. Transients would break in and use it for overnight shelter, it suffered from vandalism and nearly burned down one night, sustaining heavy damage to some upper rooms.

In 1974, the city gave the Historical Society permission to restore the house and operate it as a museum. That work proceeded slowly because of the limited resources of the society, but the historic structure is now substantially as it was 50 years ago and tours are conducted on a regular basis. (Information on these tours can be had by calling 962-5777.)

A new "barn" now being built behind the house as part of the first phase of the new Bartlett Park, will house the society's archives and allow for expanded programs at the house.

So now the Newland House, which has watched the birth, infancy and maturation of the state's 10th-largest city with a late Victorian detachment and grace, is assured of a place in the city's future as well as its past.