



The Worthy Home: A Part of Huntington Beach History

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By John Earl

There's more than meets the average human eye resting at the corner of Walnut and Sixth street in the downtown Huntington Beach area.

Some people who walk by look curiously at the old house and the bungalow that stands next to it, perhaps wondering who used to live there long ago. Some people may have brushed their fingers across the bricks made of beach sand and sea shells that were used to construct the tool shop that still stands from the first decade of the century. At least one person with a watchful eye noticed an iron ring protruding from the sidewalk out in front;

"This couldn't be for horses, could it?" he asked himself. That person was Guy Guzzardo, owner of WindanSea Surf Boards in Huntington Beach.

Like most residents of Huntington Beach, Guzzardo was unaware of the rich history involved in the site that was originally owned and developed

by Huntington Beach pioneer Matthew Helme. Guzzardo's curiosity inspired him to learn more about the house and bungalow, and in the process he learned a lot about the history of Huntington Beach in general.

For the last three years, Guzzardo has helped the present owner, Susan Worthy, maintain the property while doing research and working to get the site listed as an official historical landmark by the federal government. The efforts of Guzzardo and others paid off last March 31st when the National Registry, which lists historically important buildings throughout the country, listed the Worthy property as a national historical landmark. As one of the results of that listing, the site will probably be safe from redevelopment of the downtown area.

Guzzardo said that the city could use the power of eminent domain to take over the site, but

would first have to receive permission by the federal government, who has listed the site, and since the city was issued federal block grants. The developers for the area, Charles Rivers/Griffen Realty, reportedly would like to see the structure moved to another site to make way for redevelopment. Guzzardo points out, however, that the site was listed as a landmark because of its "integrity of location," and if the buildings on it were moved, that criteria, and the historical landmark status, would be lost. Besides, he says, "I'm not sure you could actually move it and keep it intact."

Guzzardo doesn't see a conflict between redevelopment and preserving the city's past. Pointing out that the Worthy place is only the second site in Huntington Beach to be designated an historical landmark (the Newland House is the other), and that it is the only historical building in the downtown area that is still intact, Guzzardo said, "I'm pretty proud we have something that's listed like that."

Getting the Worthy property listed as an historical landmark was no ruse to stall redevelopment.

ment. Guzzardo points out that strict requirements must be met before any place can be so listed. The site must first be nominated by the State Preservation Office based on its overall significance to the history of the local area. In order for a building to be considered, it must have been in its location for over 50 years. The Worthy site was chosen for honors because of its association with pioneer Helme, who was instrumental in the early political development of Huntington Beach, and because of its general relationship to the early history of Huntington Beach.

Originally, the Worthy house was located at 5th and Euclid

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and was probably built between 1880 and 1890. Helme, who had originally settled with his wife in Santa Ana, bought the house in 1898 and then moved it to its present corner in 1903. The house was set on logs and pulled by mules, says Guzzardo.

Huntington Beach did not even exist until 1902 or 1903, according to Guzzardo, who said that Helme was attracted to move there because of an attractive real estate deal offered by the Huntington Beach Company that was offering free land to anyone who would build a structure on it, and Helme took advantage.

Helme became involved in politics and pushed hard for incorporation of the city. He became one of the city's first city councilmen from 1909 to 1917. Then in 1916 he was named the 4th mayor of Huntington Beach. At the time, there wasn't much around in the way of businesses and supplies were hard to come by. In 1904, Helme built the large building next to his house, which was known as the Helme House Furnishing Co., one of the first businesses in the area. It served as a variety store and sold all kinds of household supplies. The building looks the same today as it did then.

Helme's daughter Amy married Lawrence Worthy, son of H.B. pioneer and celery farmer James Worthy, and the name of the store was changed to Helme Worthy. Descendants of Helme have maintained the old store building and lived in the house for four generations. The former store is now rented out and Susan Worthy presently lives in the house.

Guzzardo said that the buildings will not be used as a museum, but the exterior will be renovated to their early 20th century look.

Now that the historical site of the Worthy property has been recognized as a national treasure, Guzzardo is optimistic that the city council will allow it to remain an important part of Huntington Beach's heritage.