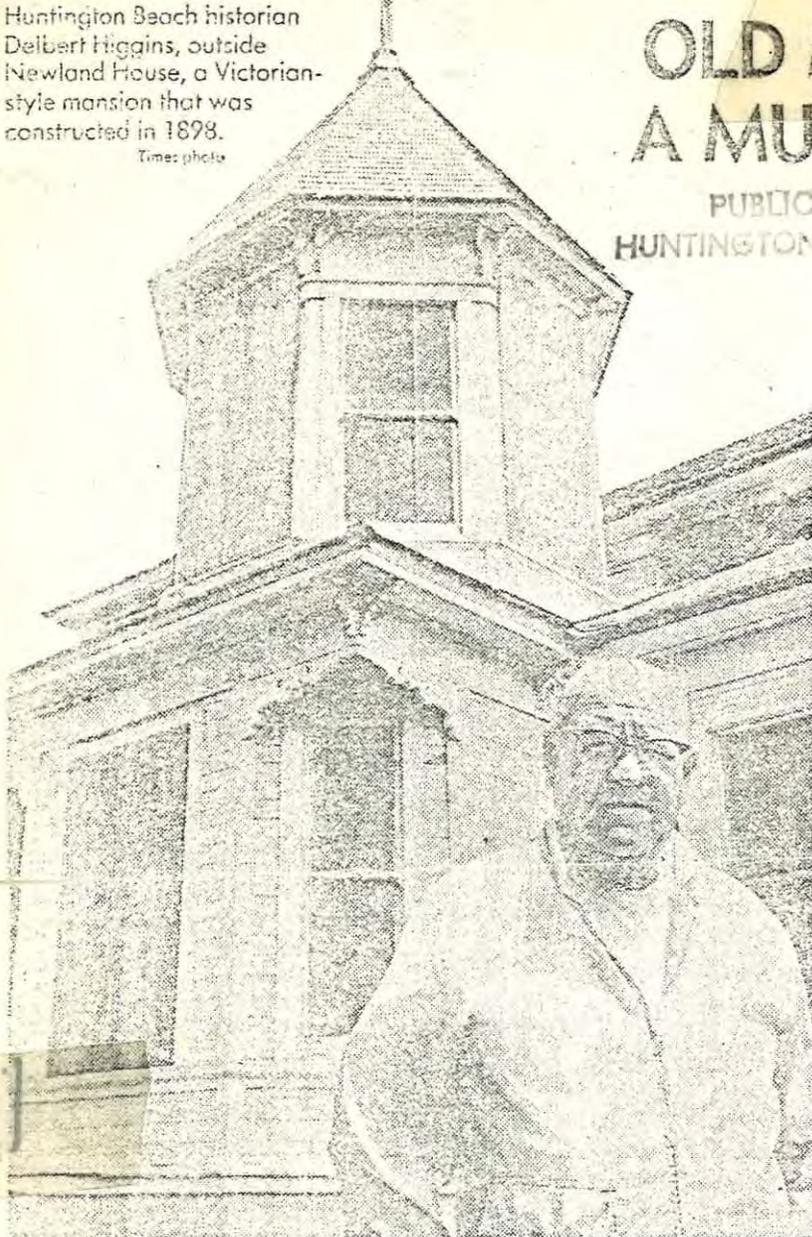


Huntington Beach historian Delbert Higgins, outside Newland House, a Victorian-style mansion that was constructed in 1898.
Times photo



OLD MANSION ON A MESA A MUSEUM IN THE MAKING

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HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIF.

BY JACK BOETTNER
Times Staff Writer

HUNTINGTON BEACH — City historian Delbert G. Higgins picked up a clam shell — a reminder of centuries past — in the front yard of the Newland House.

"Indians lived on this mesa more than a thousand years ago," Higgins said. "They'd go down into the tidal basin mud flats below, gather clams and cook them."

"Members of the Newland family have told me they have plowed up layers of clam shells and other Indian artifacts through the years. There's a lot of history on this mesa."

The Huntington Beach Historical Society is dedicated to preserving a significant part of that history — the two-story, Victorian-style mansion that William Taylor Newland built in 1898. It was the first house constructed in this city, according to Higgins.

Higgins, Mrs. Linda Enochs and a reporter roamed the grounds and discussed the ambitious community-supported restoration project. Mrs. Enochs and Higgins are members of the society.

The goal is to convert the redwood frame house into a museum through private donations and volunteer labor. Some help from the city probably will be necessary, however. September is the target date for completion.

One fund-raising effort was held Saturday when students from three junior high schools rode in a bike-a-thon along the Santa Ana River. Pledges were taken for every mile pedaled.

"I think it's great that the kids are making a contribution," said Mrs. Enochs, bike ride chairman. "The museum will be a place for the kids to come and learn about the city's history."

"It's their project, too. I'm a traditionalist. I like to see old things restored. That's what we are doing — restoring the old Newland House to the 1900 era."

The society's restoration committee, headed by Mrs. Idelle Jungbluth, has found a number of volunteers who want to get into the act, but more are needed.

Mrs. Del-Thea Gold of Newport Beach, great-granddaughter of the Newlands, is working with the Junior Ebell Club of Newport on plans to refurbish the dining room.

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An Old Mansion on a Mesa

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Orange Coast College students re-roofed the house. Volunteer carpenters rebuilt the upstairs area. A Fire Department snorkle crew put a flag pole on the cupola.

Volunteer electricians have rewired the place to bring it up to city code. A security system has been installed and walls have been given a new coat of plaster.

Work will begin soon on plumbing and air conditioning. Civic groups have signed up to refurbish some of the rooms.

The society will use a room in the old downtown library as a storage place for donated historical materials to furnish the house.

Lagging donations of turn-of-the-century household items are, at the moment, the chief concern of the society.

The original estimate on the restoration cost was \$40,000. But because there have been so many donations of labor and materials, Higgins guesses that the outlay will be closer to \$15,000.

One of the major costs will be construction of a new water line to Beach Blvd.

"There is a lot of support out there in the community," Mrs. Enochs said. "However, most people don't know what we are trying to do. I went to a store recently looking for a wood-burning stove for one of the rooms."

"I found what I wanted and told the man what it was for. I asked him how much. He said he would donate it. That's an example of how people react."

She said an antique swap meet to benefit the restoration project will be held at Golden West College June 27 under the direction of Mrs. Jungbluth and Adele Gioscia.

And a public open house has been scheduled at Newland House June 13 and 14 to coincide with Flag Day. The house will be far from complete at that time, however.

The house sits in a nest of trees on a brushy, grassy mesa about 100 yards east of Beach Blvd. and a block north of Adams Ave.

A wooden water tower in the backyard will be moved from an old garage to rebuild the

Newland faced a difficult task in building his home on the mesa overlooking the fertile farmlands of Fountain Valley, according to Higgins. The site is about a mile from the ocean.

"There were no roads connecting this area to Newport Beach in those days," Higgins said. "So Mr. Newland hitched a team of horses to a wagon and hauled lumber from McFadden's Wharf in Newport to his site along the sandy beachfront."

"And Mr. Newland scraped gravel out of the ocean at low tide. He let the rains wash the salt out. The gravel was then used in the cement foundation of the house."

"So you can see that this house is something special."

Thanks to a community effort, it appears that the Newland House will escape the urbanization rush that has seen the city's population climb to 150,000.

"I'm impressed with the determination of these women in the historical society," Higgins said. "They are doers. With a lot of help from a lot of people, I know they won't quit until the restoration job is done."

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William Taylor Newland died in the house on May 19, 1933, at age 83. His wife, Mary Zuanita, died Nov. 20, 1952, at age 93.

Two of the Newlands' 10 children were born in the house in what was known as the "birthing room," according to Mrs. Enochs.

The two, Mrs. Bernice Newland Frost and Mrs. Helen Newland Tarbox, live in Newport Beach. The only other surviving child, Clinton Newland, lives in La Jolla.

Mrs. Tarbox, 75, says, "More power to the Historical Society! What they are doing is great. They've had a hard time of it, with no city money. It's going to take time to do the restoration, but they are going to do it."

She said that none of the Newland family has lived in the house for about 20 years. But she can recall a happy childhood there.

"The most enjoyable times were Christmas and Thanksgiving," she said. "All of the family would get together then. Some would come quite a ways."

"The house was a comfortable place. Dad used the cupola for an office at first. Later, mother used it for a sewing room. You could see the ocean from there."

Forays by vandals have taken a heavy toll on the house, both inside and outside. Two fires were set — one severely damaging the upstairs rooms and caving in the roof before a caretaker was assigned to the premises. Some windows remain boarded.

The house was included in 30 acres that Signal Landmark Homes dedicated to the city for park purposes when a housing subdivision was approved. That was in April of 1974.

More than 10 acres of the site, however, lie in the flood plain. Plans call for a nature-oriented park. It will bear the name of Ted Bartlett, now in his final two years of five four-year terms on the City Council.

In a telephone interview, Bartlett said, "I'm 100% behind the society's restoration work. I'm going to donate my money just like the others."

"It would be a shame indeed if the project were to bog down after all of this hard work. The society has a mutual understanding with the council to go as far as it can in restoration."

Bartlett said the city may have to provide some sort of financial assistance because rest rooms and a parking lot will be necessary if there is to be a public museum in the history-seeped house.

Delbert Higgins, the city's historian, has lived in Huntington Beach for 69 years. For 17 years he was the city's chief lifeguard; for another 17 years he was fire chief, retiring in 1967.

Higgins' grandmother opened the first hotel and restaurant here in March of 1903. Her first meals were served in a tent at what is now 5th St. and Ocean Ave.

He has spent countless hours researching the Newland House and the contributions that the Newlands made in the early days of the city.

Although he did not personally know Newland, Higgins worked on the family's farm as a teen-ager.

"Newland, a goateed man of short physical stature, was instrumental in starting the first school for kindergarten through sixth grade here," Higgins said. "He helped build the first church. He organized the first bank and established the first newspaper."

"He was instrumental in starting the first high school district in 1906. Westminster, Springdale, Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach schools combined in that first district. Bonds were voted for the high school."

"Mr. Newland and his wife were strong for education. She was on the high school and elementary school boards for more than 12 years."

Newland, Phillip Stanton and others bought 40 acres from Col. Bob Northam, recorded a subdivision map and staked out what was then known as Pacific City in 1901, according to Higgins.

Stanton at one time was speaker of the State Assembly.

When the Pacific Electric Railway reached the community, the city name was changed to Huntington Beach in honor of railroad president Henry E. Huntington, Higgins said. That occurred July 4, 1904.

But Newland was the real leader in organizing the town. He insisted that it include four services — a blacksmith shop, a school, a church and a country store.

Huntington Beach High School, a pet project of the Newlands, opened in 1908 on land donated by the Huntington Beach Co., Higgins said.

Higgins said Mr. and Mrs. Newland came west from Quincy, Ill., and settled first in Compton. Later Newland leased Irvine Ranch land and raised barley for 10 years, becoming well-to-do and earning the title of "Barley King," Higgins said.

Subsequently, Newland bought 500 acres, bounded by Adams, Beach, Newland St. and Yorktown Ave. Primarily, the ranch produced corn, lima beans, celery, sugar beets and chili peppers.

Higgins pointed out that Newland invented a tool to yank willow trees and used it to clear low-lying acreage for cultivation.

The Newland property was part of a vast Spanish land grant, Rancho Los Bolsas, that went to the Manuel Nieto family. Nieto was a sergeant in the Gaspar de Portola expedition that came through this area in 1769.

In the same band of soldiers was Jose Antonio Yorba, who also received a Spanish land grant and settled in Santa Ana Canyon.

Higgins said other owners of the Newland property over the year have been Abel Stearns and Alfred Robinson and Assoc. of San Francisco. Newland also leased property to Signal Oil Co.