

FACE IN THE CROWD

History student sheds new light on history of Huntington Beach

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Here are a couple of things you won't find in the published histories of Huntington Beach:

■ In the early 1900s, Huntington Beach officials threatened to secede from Orange County and join Los Angeles County unless more road funds were forthcoming from Santa Ana. They soon got the money.

■ The oil well that long has been recognized as the well that started the city's oil boom in May 1920 — Huntington No. 1 — was actually the city's second well. The oil that would change the city's future was discovered a couple of months earlier when a well was drilled near the city's border with Newport Beach.

These facts come courtesy of Barbara Milkovich, who has spent the last three years doing research for the most complete history of the city yet written.

In the spring, Milkovich, 48, finished what she hopes will be only the first installment, a 150-page account of the city's formative years, 1900 through 1930.

So far, the only copies other than hers own belong to California State University, Long Beach, which accepted them as her thesis for her master's degree in history. In the coming months, Milkovich hopes to make copies available at City Hall and at local libraries, where the section on city history is pretty thin.

"I'm probably the first person to look at Huntington Beach from a graduate-scholar level," she said.

Milkovich has her sights on a doctorate in history and hopes to do her dissertation on the complete city history, not only telling what the city was but determining why it became what it is.

Two of the key questions she will address:

■ Why didn't Huntington Beach, which has an oil field among the richest in the United States, become a major industrial center like Long Beach?

■ Why did Huntington Beach turn out relatively "scruffy," as she calls it, com-

pared with its elegant neighbor to the south, Newport Beach?

"I'm still looking for the answers, but I'm starting to get a feeling," she said.

She spends much of her time digging through old newspapers and financial records and interviewing old timers.

Her research has led Milkovich to be the city's most visible advocate for preservation of historic buildings. She is chairwoman of the city's Historic Resources Board and archivist of the Huntington Beach Historical Society.

"We've already lost our big treasures," she said, citing the demolition of the old City Hall and the destruction of many other historical buildings to make room for oil wells.

On the current demolition hit list are many 60- and 70-year-old buildings in the downtown area that are in the way of redevelopment, not to mention the Municipal Pier, built in 1914.

"I wish they would understand that preservation is redevelop-



Barbara Milkovich
Chronicles Huntington Beach's past

ment," she said.

The city is planning to keep one block of Main Street intact to create a historic district, which she sees as some progress.

Other treasures that must be protected at all costs, she said, are the Italianate Huntington Beach High School, Ethel Dwyer Middle School (done in the Moderne style), and the Northam ranch house, believed to be the city's first dwelling.

— Frank Mickadeit/The Register

