

Alexandria Latragna

From: Gary McAulay <gary.mcaulay@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 12, 2021 7:52 PM
To: Bruces Beach Task Force
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Great research by Kristin!

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I just wanted to commend Kristin on the awesome research that she has done.
Outstanding and too-often unappreciated work.
She has found a lot of information that was previously missed.

Alexandria Latragna

From: Garraway, Isla <IGarraway@mednet.ucla.edu>
Sent: Sunday, April 18, 2021 8:49 PM
To: Alexandria Latragna
Cc: Anthony Lee
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Draft of History Panels
Attachments: Text for the Panels.docx

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Attachment included. Thanks!

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Anthony A. Lee" <member1700@gmail.com>
Date: April 18, 2021 at 2:49:30 PM PDT
To: "Garraway, Isla" <IGarraway@mednet.ucla.edu>, Kristin Long <klongs@gmail.com>, "Tyler St. Bernard" <tylerstb@gmail.com>, Lindsey Fox <lindseywfox@gmail.com>
Subject: Draft of History Panels

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Dear History Committee:

As I promised, I did boil down the history of Bruce's Beach into a short narrative of three pages. Plus Anthony Bruce's statement. This is a rough draft for the history panels which you can do what you want with. It may need to be cut down even further for practical reasons. You need to add pictures and maps, of course.

I suppose this should fit on two or three history panels. I am not sure, and it would depend on the type of panels you are looking at. But you will have to work with the text to accommodate the space.

It would be a shame to lose Willa Bruce's voice, but you can remove her quote in the middle of the narrative. You might also want to correct facts and dates, if I got anything wrong. The important thing is to have a very brief and readable narrative centered around the Bruce family and their actions and their mistreatment. I do note the destruction of an emerging black neighborhood and the violent activities of the KKK. I was tempted to include Dougherty's confession made years later. But it made the narrative too long.

Anyway, if the City Council wants to pick over the wording of the text, they will have a lot to work with. The tone here is pretty soft, and it may not be acceptable to black activists, either. So look it over carefully. I hope it is readable and would hold the attention of tourists and visitors to the park.

Anyway, it is your project. So you can edit and change this narrative in any way you want to.

Anthony

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BRUCE'S BEACH

An Important Site of African American History

In the early decades of the twentieth century, African Americans were only beginning to participate in the mainstream of American life and popular culture. At the same time, black people were being dispossessed of their land forced out of small towns and suburbs all across the country, forced into ghettos in large cities. Manhattan Beach is a part of that complicated history.

Charles and Willa Bruce, Early Entrepreneurs

In 1912, a black couple, Charles and Willa Bruce, were able to purchase a lot of land on the beachfront at this location in Manhattan Beach. Mrs. Bruce said that they had been refused land everywhere else along the coast. But somehow they secured the beachfront land here.

The Bruces were the first black residents of Manhattan Beach. They turned their property into the only beach resort open to African Americans along the California coastline. Guests would arrive to find "a small cottage with a stand that sold soda pop and lunches," rented bathing suits, and provided access to bathing showers and dressing tents. The red car line provided easy public transportation from Los Angeles. Eventually, the Bruces were able to buy the lot next door and construct a permanent, two-story brick lodge.

One visitor remembered, years later: "You would take the Red Car down ... and spend a day on the beautiful beach or rent a room if you desired." One weekends, the beach attracted a large number of black families and school gatherings. Another guest remembered: "If one tired of the sand and surf, the parlor was available for listening to music or dancing."

When Bruce's Beach opened, African Americans were unwelcome at all other California beaches. This spot allowed blacks to participate in the emerging new, modern California culture of leisure and recreation, a day at the beach and bathing in the sun and surf. Black families from as far away as San Diego would drive for hours to enjoy this beach.

Between 1919-1926, at least six other properties near Bruces' Beach resort were purchased by African Americans, creating a small black neighborhood. These included Major George and Mrs. Ethel Prioleau, Ms. Elizabeth Patterson, Mrs. Mary Sanders, Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna Johnson, John McCaskill, Elzia L. Irvin, and Mr. and Mrs. James Slaughter. But the neighborhood would soon be destroyed.

Opposition and Harassment

From the beginning, there was discomfort and opposition from the white residents of Manhattan Beach to this African American establishment. Within a week of opening, landowners of adjoining properties expressed their agitation and began harassing guests. African Americans visiting the Bruces' resort were blocked from easy access to the beach when "No Trespassing" signs were placed around the strip of ocean frontage spanning the pier (at 34th Street) to 24th street, forcing beachgoers to walk a half mile in each direction to get to the water. Realtors and City officials complained about depressed property values because of the black residents.

The Ku Klux Klan

By 1924, the Ku Klux Klan was actively recruiting in the South Bay area. It was operating unrestricted along the beaches. In Redondo Beach, the KKK handed out pamphlets to black fishermen. Klan membership rolls included many civic leaders and policemen, including the mayors of Redondo Beach and Los Angeles.

A number of racially motivated incidents followed. Air was let out of tires of cars parked near the Bruces' resort while owners were at the beach. Someone set fire to a mattress under the main building of Bruce's Lodge. A black-owned home on 23rd Street was set ablaze and almost burned down. Someone set up "10 Minutes Only" parking to deter blacks from visiting the resort. Two African American homes were shot at and set on fire. A cross was burned on the other side of the street.

The Land is Confiscated

In 1921, the Manhattan Beach City Council (then, the Board of Trustees) was asked to take action to discourage blacks from moving into Manhattan Beach. Several civic

leaders circulated a petition urging the Council to seize the properties near Bruce's Beach on the pretext of creating a new city park. The petition was presented to the Council on November 15, 1923. Almost immediately thereafter, on January 3, 1924, the Manhattan Beach City Council passed ordinance 263, claiming eminent domain for a public park. The black owned residences were condemned, along with several lots of vacant land owned by whites.

The Bruces, along with three other black families sued the City of Manhattan Beach for racial discrimination in 1924, hoping to keep their dreams alive. Mrs. Bruce wrote a letter to her neighbors saying, "We have always felt and we hope we will be pardoned for plainly and bluntly saying so, that the attempt to make a park out of these two blocks was a direct slap at us because we were not born white people." In May of 1927, Charles and Willa Bruce surrendered their land and the buildings on it to the City of Manhattan Beach. They moved to Los Angeles. It wasn't until June of 1929 that a final judgement was rendered by the courts, and the Bruce's were paid \$14,500 for their property.

Discrimination and Lawsuit

Black families were still coming to Bruce's Beach even after Bruce's Lodge was closed. The police were instructed to arrest them as "trespassers" and "undesirables." During 1927, four black men were arrested at the beach and thrown in jail. The men were fined by a local court. But the case was appealed. The men were defended by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the conviction was overturned by the Los Angeles Superior Court. This was an important victory that established that racial exclusion at the California beaches was unconstitutional.

Bruce's Beach Park

No substantial construction of a park was undertaken by the City. The land remained vacant and trash-strewn for decades. In 1956, the land was finally terraced and landscaped and became known as Beachfront Park.

The park underwent several name changes. In 1996, responding to the activism of the residents of the city, the Manhattan Beach City Council finally renamed the park Bruce's Beach.

STATEMENT BY ANTHONY BRUCE

Great-great grandson of Charles and Willa Bruce

This park is dedicated to the Charles and Willa of the Bruce Family. They stood against racism. They fought against the injustices of crimes committed by hate factions; and their descendants still do today.

They were American citizens who believed In God and Country. They also believed in the high ideals of the American Constitution and the Pledge of Allegiance. They held a firm belief that there must be Justice and Freedom for all people living in America, no matter their race or national origin. They stood for Equality and the Right to be treated as equal citizens of our beautiful City of Manhattan Beach.

March 2021