

Mrs. Willa Ann Bruce (b. 1862, Missouri), and her husband, Charles Aaron Bruce (b. 1860, District of Columbia) were American pioneers. In February 1912, Mrs. Bruce purchased a lot between 26th and 27th Streets in the sparsely developed town of Manhattan Beach. She was an entrepreneur and visionary determined to create a destination where racially diverse Americans could enjoy the ocean. It would be called "Bruce's Beach". When the seaside resort opened on June 17, 1912, it was one of the few places where Black beachgoers could access a Beach Bath House and rent bathing suits, in addition to other amenities. By the early 1920s, hundreds, even thousands of Black families visited the resort. The Bruce family expanded on their investment by building additional structures for lodging, a dance hall, a restaurant and purchasing an adjacent lot. Encouraged by the Bruces' success, other families bought property nearby. Following the opening of Bruce's Beach, harassment from the KU KLUX KLAN and white neighbors began. 'FAKE' "No Trespassing" signs were put up on the beach in front of the resort, by landowner George Peck, forcing visitors to walk a half mile to reach the water. As the popularity of the resort soared, the attacks intensified. Spearheaded by George Lindsey, a real estate agent in the North End of Manhattan Beach who said, "White landowners feared an "invasion" by members of the African American community," in 1924, the Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees passed ordinances that prohibited the opening of bath houses and amusement enterprises without Trustee approval on the Strand which threatened the Bruces' livelihood. The ordinances established an eminent domain claim to the land between 26th and 27th Streets, from the Strand to Highland Avenue.

The Bruces did not want to give up their property due to eminent domain, asserting that the proceedings were racially motivated. In a letter to the Manhattan Beach News published February 4, 1927, the Bruce family wrote: "We have always felt....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." Willa Bruce once vowed to the LA Times at the beginning of the venture, "Whenever we have tried to buy land for a beach resort we have been refused. But I own this land and I'm going to keep it." On May 16, 1927, the Bruce family were coerced by the courts to give up their land at less than market value. Amid all of the unjust racial atrocities they were finally forced to abandon their dreams in Manhattan Beach in 1929.