

The Presence of the Ku Klux Klan & the "Race War" of 1928

On October 18, 1927, "hooded" individuals approached the Slaughter house during the night and covered the gas meter with oil-soaked waste, accelerant, cotton and lit a match to it. The Slaughters were awoken by the smoke, but were able to extinguish the fire before the fire department arrived. The *California Eagle* reported that "there are individuals who are determined that justice and decency shall not prevail and are endeavoring to terrorize and instill fear into the hearts of Colored residents of Manhattan Beach." The following night, October 19, 1927, the *Eagle* stated that "the fiery cross of the KKK" was burned across the street from the Slaughter home. Other reports state shots were fired at their home. Despite these attempts at intimidation, the Slaughters were "not of the running kind".

Ku Klux Klan Still Working at Manhattan Beach

Notwithstanding the fact that the high class citizens of Manhattan Beach got together some months ago on a basis of commonsense and decency for the good of all and repealed all obnoxious ordinances aimed at Colored people, there are left degraded and ignorant individuals who are determined that justice and decency shall not prevail and are endeavoring to terrorize and instill fear into the hearts of the Colored residents of the beach.

KU KLUX KLAN

While it is general conceded that Ku Klux Klan is disintegrated, it develops there are remnants of the hooded order yet in existence at this particular spot. On the night of October, the 18th, in the dead hours of the night, he motly hooded cowards crept up to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. James Slaughter and literally covered the gas meter under the house with oil soaked waste, excelsior and cotton and applied a match to it. Fortunately the fumes of smoke awakened the family, they turned in the alarm, but succeeded in extinguishing the fire before the department arrived.

The very next night, right across the street, the fiery cross of the K. K. K. was burned.

We are pleased to note that the Slaughter family is not of the running kind and the cowardly midnight prowlers will meet their just deserts before they get far with the rough stuff they are attempting to pull off.

California Eagle, October 28, 1927

By February, 1928, the multiple racially-motivated incidents had sparked an investigation by the 1928 Los Angeles County Grand Jury. One of the first investigations was the alleged "anti-race arson plot at Manhattan Beach, where it is charged houses of Negro residents have been dynamited and set on fire by white citizens objecting to the presence of Negroes." District Attorney Asa Keyes intimated that "some big names" are involved in the arson play. "Dynamite, bullets and the secret torch are all alleged to have been employed by residents in order to induce the negroes to travel. Certain citizens objected to a colored settlement." *The Venice Vanguard* reported "It was learned that seven Manhattan Beach citizens have been questioned by operatives in regard to the race trouble. One of these seven, it is said, has been Jack Garvin, Manhattan's chief of police. The other six are business men of the community."

Acknowledging the Bruce Legacy at the Park

Beginning in 1932, there were plans for development and some funding for the park. By August 11, 1933, the *Manhattan Beach News* reported that "Beach Front Park... has been graded and its terraced surface planted to moss, pending further development that will include extensive landscaping, game areas, and tennis courts." Though it's unclear exactly how much of this plan came to fruition, the development of some sort of park was ongoing. In 1948, the earlier-installed landscaping was removed.

The park underwent several name changes. Then, in December 2005, Manhattan Beach resident and activist, Patrick McBride, requested that the park be named after the civil rights issues related to the park's history. Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation agreed. In July 2006, after passionate public comment from members of the community, the name of the park was officially changed to Bruce's Beach.

The newly named Bruce's Beach park was dedicated on Saturday, March 31, 2007, including Willa and Charles's grandson, Bernard Bruce. Bernard told the crowd: "This is a happy day for my family and me. It is a happy day for Southern California, for African Americans, for the whole country. We are remembering our past."

