

# The Historic Black Enclave of Bruce's Beach

## **Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. and Willie "Willa" A. Bruce**

Mrs. Willie "Willa" A. Bruce purchased Lot 8 of Block 5 on the Strand in Peck's Manhattan Beach Tract in 1912. With her husband, Charles, Willa opened Bruce's Beach on June 17, 1912, a seaside resort for bathing and fishing. It started as a small portable cottage with a stand that sold soda pop and lunches. Guests could rent bathing suits, access showers and dressing tents. While Charles worked as a chef on the train, Willa ran the business. As hundreds of guests visited the resort, other Black families purchased property in this section of Manhattan Beach, creating a diverse summer community. For the history of the Bruce Resort, please see the plaque located on the strand.

## **Mrs. Mary R. Sanders (Washington)**

On September 15, 1923, Mrs. Mary Sanders (not pictured) bought Lot 6, Block 12. Mrs. Sanders was born 1872 in Canada and immigrated to the United States in 1887. She worked as a caterer for private families and was described as "a woman of considerable success and prestige."

## **Ms. Elizabeth (Emma) M. Patterson**

The other half of the Prioleau lot was purchased by Ms. Elizabeth M. Patterson in 1922. Ms. Patterson was born in Tennessee in 1877, and was a longtime friend of the Prioleau family from when they lived in Kansas. Together, Ms. Patterson and the Prioleaus built a duplex on their lots. This duplex still exists in a different location today in Manhattan Beach.

## **Major Reverend George W. and Mrs. Ethel Prioleau**

In 1919, the Prioleaus purchased the southern half of Lot 4, Block 12. During the Spanish-American War, Maj. Rev. Prioleau served with the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry. During her husband's military service, Ethel taught classes for army officers' wives. Maj. Rev. Prioleau challenged the hypocrisy of fighting a war for liberation in Cuba while the United States was locked in the mindset of racism and segregation. He moved to Los Angeles following his retirement and founded the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Ethel graduated from Normal Teacher Training College in Kansas. After her children were barred from accessing the swimming pool in Exposition Park, she successfully sued the city of Los Angeles, resulting in the desegregation of city pools.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna E. Johnson**

Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna Johnson (not pictured) purchased Lot 1, Block 12 in 1923. Milton B. Johnson was born in Canada and came to the United States in 1874. He married Anna E. Davis on October 27, 1914. Milton worked as a porter for the railroad.

## **Mr. and Mrs. James and Lula Slaughter**

The Slaughter family moved to Manhattan Beach during the eminent domain proceedings, purchasing property to the south of the condemned area. In May 1927, the same month that the Bruces' resort closed, the Slaughters opened a 10 - room boarding house. They lived in Manhattan Beach year-round with their seven children.

## **Other Property Owners**

The remaining 25 lots of land in those two blocks were owned by White property owners. The majority of the lots were owned by investors B.H. Dyer, R.L. Rice, and H.M. Eichelberger and were never developed.

The other lots owned by White property owners were: C.W. Stone - Lot 3, Block 5 George W. Yarrow - Lots 4 and 6, Block 5; Lot 11, Block 12 Lillie D. Dosta - Lot 7, Block 5 Sarah I. Ambrose, Marion R. Wyser (Southern California Bond & Finance Company) - Lot 7, Block 12 R.C. Ruperd - Lot 10, Block 12 Grace R. Stuart - Lot 13, Block 12 L.A. Dreisbach (M.W. Mitchell) - Lot 14, Block 12 Clara M. Monroe - Lot 15, Block 12 H.A. Ecclestone - Lot 16, Block 12. By 1924, none of them had been developed.

## Harassment Protested by the NAACP

Despite the condemnation proceedings and ongoing harassment from White residents, Black beachgoers continued to visit Manhattan Beach. In May 1927, the Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees leased the entire beach between 16th and 19th Streets, and later all of 25th Street, to local businessman, Oscar C. Bessonette. Now considered private property, unwanted visitors to the beach could be subject to arrest.

On July 4, 1927, a 19-year-old Black UCLA student, Elizabeth Catley, was arrested by Manhattan Beach Police for “trespassing” on the “private beach.” According to the *Times*, she was held in the Redondo Beach jail for hours wearing only her bathing suit.

On July 17, the NAACP organized a peaceful protest led by Los Angeles chapter President Dr. Henry Claude Hudson, Manhattan Beach resident John McCaskill, J.H. Conley and Romalious Johnson. The men were arrested for resisting an officer and taken to jail. During their August trial, Bessonette admitted under oath that the intention of the “no trespassing” signs was to keep “undesirables” off the beach, which he defined as “colored people”.

The court found the defendants guilty; however, the men appealed to the Superior Court of Los Angeles, and their attorney Hugh E. Macbeth moved for “an arrest of judgement in the Manhattan court.” This request was granted, and the City Council canceled its lease with Bessonette, thereby opening the beaches to all.

The next day, *The California Eagle* proudly declared: “NAACP Wins Beach Victory.” In a telegram to the national branch of the NAACP, Dr. Hudson, Los Angeles branch president, proclaimed: “Manhattan Beach fight won. Only 45 days from the first intimidation of Colored citizens in Manhattan to complete victory by [the] Los Angeles branch.”

The NAACP’s actions and the court’s decision set a precedent that would forever discourage “private exploitation” of the Manhattan beachfront. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, this would forbid the erection of any building or barrier that would obstruct any citizens at any time. It reported: “The beach is open only for public playground.”

## ***The Ku Klux Klan and the “Race War” of 1928***

*On July 4, 1924, the California Eagle reported that Black fishermen in Redondo Beach were given Ku Klux Klan pamphlets labelled “Colored Folks Beach three miles North.” The Eagle speculated that the Klan was “operating unrestrictedly along the waterfront,” including Manhattan Beach. While there is no definitive evidence of Klan involvement, the article suggested that the Klan influenced the Board of Trustees in condemning Bruce’s Beach.*

On the night of October 18, 1927, “hooded” individuals allegedly approached the Slaughter residence and set the gas meter aflame. Awakened by smoke, the Slaughters extinguished the fire. The *California Eagle* reported that “there are individuals who are...endeavoring to terrorize and instill fear into the hearts of Colored residents of Manhattan Beach.”

In February 1928, the Los Angeles newspaper *The Record*, reported an announcement by chief detective of the Los Angeles district attorney’s office, George Contreras, of an investigation into the “burning and dynamiting of the home of negro residents of Manhattan Beach, which has grown to the proportion of a race war.” The *Venice Evening Vanguard* reported that “the anti-negro forces have tried to leep the town white by even buying out colored holdings at more than their true value, but in vain. Failing in peaceful means, harsher measures apparently have been resorted to in order to gain their ends, say the investigators.”

The 1928 Grand Jury did not pursue any formal indictments, and according to the *Times*, more evidence was requested and no witnesses were called in the investigation.

### **The Bruce Legacy of the Park**

Although development plans were documented, accounts vary as to how much progress was made in the construction of the public park. From 1928 until 1962, the area was referred to as City Park or Beach Front Park, and following a contest hosted by the Kiwanis Club in 1962, it was officially designated Bayview Terrace Park. As a goodwill gesture to the Sister City Program, the park was renamed Parque Culiacan in 1974.

In 2005, after several name changes, Manhattan Beach resident and activist Patrick McBride requested re-naming the park to reflect its history related to civil rights. Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation agreed. After passionate public comment from community members, the park was officially named Bruce's Beach and dedicated on Saturday, March 31, 2007. Willie "Willa" and Charles’s grandson, Bernard Bruce 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.”

# *Buyer of Resort In Lake County Sets At Rest Current Rumor*

Fears of Lake county residents that their country was to be the scene of a negro invasion was set at rest yesterday by an announcement here by Joseph Greenbach,, San Francisco builder, who recently purchased the summer resort formerly operated by Paul J. Stuparich near Middletown.

Since the sale of the Stuparich resort, one of the most pretentious in the county, rumors have been running throughout Lake county that it had been sold to a negro organization, who planned to make the place over into a "country club." Greenbach stated positively that such is not the case, but that the resort will be opened for business again next summer on the same lines it has been operated for several years.

Santa Rosa Republican, 1928

# LAKE COUNTY WAS FEARFUL OF 'INVASION'

## Rumors of Negro Colony Agitated Up Country People

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### K. K. K. SIGNS PAINTED.

The rumors had aroused Lake County citizens to such a height that automobiles full of hooded citizens recently staged a demonstration near the Stuparich resort, and painted "K. K. K." in large letters on pavements, trees, walls and fences surrounding the resort.

One Middletown paper openly threatened that "a negro invasion will bring on trouble and result in bloodshed."

A leading article in this paper continued:

"Lake County always has been known as a 'white man's country.' Years ago 400 Chinese miners imported here were marched back to Calistoga in the dead of night by an enraged mob of citizens. A Japanese, attempting to farm near Middletown, found he was not wanted and left the country.



**NORTH BALTIMOREANS  
FEAR NEGRO INVASION**

**Two Organizations Are Formed To  
Prevent Ingress And Protect  
Property Values.**

**WILL USE COURTS AS WEAPON**

**Effort Will Be Made To Insert Re-  
strictive Clause In New Zon-  
ing Ordinance.**

Residents of North Baltimore are much perturbed over the possibility of a negro invasion of their neighborhoods and are considering what steps they can take to check any such movement. Two organizations have already been formed, the Civic Improvement and Protective Association, which includes property owners in the territory bounded by Calvert, Twenty-first, Twenty-fifth and Calvert streets, and Maryland avenue; and the Maryland Avenue Association, which represents property owners to the west of the Civic Association. The primary purpose is to protect their territory from the invasion of negroes and other undesirable residents and businesses. Other organizations, it is said, are in contemplation.

William S. Norris, president of the Peabody Heights Improvement Association, said yesterday that his association was not much troubled by the possibility of a negro invasion because all the property in Peabody Heights was restricted, that is, the deeds all contain clauses preventing its sale to persons of other than the Caucasian race.

Baltimore Sun 1921

the movement.

**Negro Invasions  
Have Cost \$25,000,000,  
Hemmelmann Says**

Negro invasion of white residence districts in St. Louis already has caused a damage to property of about \$25,000,000, according to Theodore Hemmelmann, Jr., president of the Hemmelmann-Spackler Real Estate Company. He declares the entry of one negro resident in a white residence block causes values to shrink 50 per cent. In a statement issued yesterday Hemmelmann recounts his personal experiences.

His statement follows:  
"More than fifteen years ago I built

St. Louis Globe 1916

**'BE A FACTOR IN BUSINESS WORLD'**

Advice of Meyer Jarmulowsky, East Side Banker, to

**HARLEM REAL ESTATE**

Values Have Deteriorated Since Negro Invasion Because Negro Became Tenant Not Owner.

**RACES SHOULD ARBITRATE**

Mr. Jarmulowsky Says White Owners Should Confer With Negroes and Form a Working Agreement.

"The Housing Problem of Negro Tenants from the Owner's Point of View," was the subject of an interesting address delivered by Meyer Jarmulowsky before the Young Men's Guild of St. Philip's P. E. Church last Thursday evening. Mr. Jarmulowsky is a member of the firm of M. and I. Jarmulowsky, bankers, at 65 E. Broadway, and his efforts in bettering the condition of his race on the East Side are well known to many. The speaker's talk was not only interesting but very instructive and helpful.

At the beginning of his address Mr.

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# NEGRO INVASION RESISTED BY DYNAMITE

Special to Times-Star by United Press.  
KANSAS CITY, May 31.—Negro invasion into one of the residential districts heretofore occupied only by whites, was resented today by dynamite. An attempt was made to blow up the house of Augustus Morgan, a negro. A number of windows were broken. No one was injured.

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ELECTRIC LIGHT BOARD

Alameda Times, 1911



THE revival, thruout the country, of "The Birth of a Nation," was a shrewd piece of business.

Whether the revival will do good or harm depends upon the impression it makes upon the public mind. Simple minds will, no doubt, be inflamed by it. Thoughtful minds will be made still more thoughtful.

"The Birth of a Nation" is a wonderful photoplay. It is the story of the real Ku Klux Klan.

The war between the north and the south was over. "The Little Colonel" returned to his southern home. Hordes of negroes, freed by the war, were raging up and down the country, terrorizing and destroying, led by white carpetbaggers from the north.

The whites were outnumbered and outvoted. There were black judges and black legislators, many of them illiterate.

*The negroes were not ready for the franchise thus suddenly thrust upon them. They did not know how to exercise it. In justice we must remember, if there were instances of negro invasion of the sanctity of the white man's home, during reconstruction, there were countless instances during slavery days, of white invasion of the negro's home.*

There was this difference: The negro was driven by lust, while the white man was inspired by greed as well as lust. And a black mammy loves her

pickaninny with the same kind of love that a white mother feels for her child.

But all that is past, thank God!

"The Little Colonel," heart-sick because his home was in ruins and his women-folk in danger of a fate worse than death, sees two little white children frighten some pickaninnies by putting a sheet over their heads and saying "Boo!"

*And that is what the real Ku Klux Klan did—it put a sheet on its head and said "Boo" to the negroes, who, being ignorant and superstitious, were frightened into submission to law and order.*

The real Ku Klux Klan was illegal, of course, but it was necessary in that awful crisis, but as our own vigilantes were illegal but necessary in the early days of the west.

Those real klansmen who followed the Fiery Cross were fighting for their homes, wives and children. They were in deadly earnest. They were hard-riding, straight-shooting, fighting men.

AMERICA has been visited by a second Ku Klux Klan patterned after the first. Look over the local leaders, if you know them. What one among them—the fat, soft physician, the sleek lawyer, the thin, anaemic haberdasher, the hand-shaking office-holder—any one of them—would you describe as a hard-riding, straight-shooting fighting man? Not one!

*What one among them is fighting for his home and women-folk? Or imagines he is? Not one!*

Granting that there are many injustices and inequalities in this imperfect civilization of ours, what wrong condition cannot be righted by the orderly processes of law?

And where is the wrong-doer of today who can be frightened into right-doing by a man in a pillow-case saying "Boo?"

*The rank and file of the second Ku Klux Klan is honest. The rank and file of every great movement is always honest. But the leaders of it are not honest.*

Disguised as the-only-true-Americans, they hide behind pillow-cases and silly mysticism, saying "Boo!" thus hoping to gain some business or political advantage.

## ELDER BETRAYED GIRL



can civilization was builded.

If you will even study the history of economic conditions in this country you will find that it is the poor white man that is constantly crying about **Negro invasion**. The truly wealthy white man objects to the presence of the poor white man in his midst as strenuously as does he the Negro.

Read Walter White' "Fire In The Flint" and you will find that in the remotest sections of the South the Negro is making

California Eagle, 1927



**LOOK At These Homes NOW!**

An entire block ruined by **negro invasion**. Every house marked "X" now occupied by negroes. **ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPH OF 4300 WEST BELLE PLACE.**

**SAVE YOUR HOME! VOTE FOR SEGREGATION!**

73

*St. Louis, 1916. Leaflet urging voters to adopt a referendum that prohibited African Americans from moving onto predominantly white blocks.*

*The Color of Law, Richard Rothstein*