

CITY OF MANHATTAN BEACH

Bruce's Beach Task Force: History Subcommittee Report

February 22, 2021

Councilmember Hildy Stern, Co-Chair

Councilmember Steve Napolitano, Co-Chair

History Subcommittee:

Allison Hales

Isla Garraway

Lindsey Fox

Kristin Long-Drew

Tyler St. Bernard

INDEX

THE PROCESS	3
TIMELINE OF EVENTS	4
1900-1912	4
The Role of George H. Peck, Jr.	6
1913-1924	7
The Role of the KKK	10
Complaint of Condemnation: 1924-1929	11
NAACP Swim-In	17
After 1929	17
The History of the Park	18
WORKS CITED	25

THE PROCESS

The Bruce's Beach history subcommittee was tasked to go through publicly available documents and sources in order to prepare an accurate factual synopsis of the timeline of events that occurred from when the Bruce family acquired their first property in Manhattan Beach in 1912 through the renaming of the park and installation of the Bruce's Beach plaque in 2007.

As part of this process, the subcommittee sought to verify facts and clarify folklore surrounding the events of the eminent domain proceedings in Manhattan Beach in the 1920s. We compared the theses of Robert L. Brigham and Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson, as well as Dr. Jefferson's book, "Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era" with other reports from that time, specifically newspaper articles and government records.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and a flood at the Los Angeles Hall of Records, we were unable to obtain documentation needed to clarify many claims. We've noted these instances as necessary and when the information becomes available, we will update this document accordingly.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1900-1912



Charles and Willa Bruce, Circa 1886. Source unknown.

Willie Ann Bruce (b. 1862, Missouri), and her husband, Charles Aaron Bruce (b. 1860, District of Columbia) lived with their son, Harvey (b.1888) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where Charles worked as a cook¹. Between 1900 and 1904, their family moved to downtown Los Angeles and purchased a home at 1024 Santa Fe Avenue.²

During this same time, the town of Manhattan Beach was taking form. Between 1898 and 1901, the area four miles north of Redondo was known as Potencia, Spanish for “power” and what an ambitious group of businessmen hoped to harness from the ocean and convert into electricity³. The enterprise folded following a winter storm in 1899 that destroyed most of the pier and, thus, presumably, most of the wave motor.⁴

In September, 1901, John A. Merrill and his Manhattan Beach Company purchased the land formerly owned by the Potencia Townsite Company, to build a new resort along the

¹ Year: 1900; Census Place: *Albuquerque, Bernalillo, New Mexico*; Page: 6; Enumeration District: 0009; FHL microfilm: 1240999

² 1904 LA City Directory, Los Angeles City Directory Co, Inc. Los Angeles, CA. Pg. 211

³ *Los Angeles Times*, “Los Angeles and Vicinity: Ocean Power,” December 11, 1897.

⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, “Reported Wreck of the Wright Wave Motor at Potencia-Notes,” January 15, 1899.

Pacific called “Manhattan Beach”.⁵ George H. Peck, Jr. , would buy the area to the north of the pier from the Manhattan Beach Company in October of the same year called North Manhattan Beach.⁶ Despite the historic folklore claiming that the town’s name was the result of a coin flip between Peck and Merrill, there is no concrete evidence to support this story.

In May, 1912, Mrs. Willie Bruce purchased Lot 8 of Block 5 in Peck’s Manhattan Beach Tract from Los Angeles real estate agent Henry Willard. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that she paid \$1,225 for the 33’ x 100’ parcel between 26th and 27th streets on The Strand, west of Ocean Drive, which was “a high price compared to the cost of nearby lots.”⁷ (*Please note: We were unable to receive deeds to confirm this information in time for this report. We will update this as soon as that becomes available.*)



(l-r) Meda (Mrs. Harvey) Bruce, Harvey Bruce, and Willa Bruce, presumably at the first incarnation of Bruce’s Beach in 1912.

An advertisement in the *Liberator* announced that the June 17, 1912, opening of “Bruce Beach Front”, a seaside resort for bathing and fishing would be a “grand affair”⁸. Guests would arrive to find “a small portable cottage with a stand that sold soda pop and lunches,” rented bathing suits and provided access to bathing showers and dressing tents.⁹ While her husband, Charles, worked as a dining-car chef on the train running

⁵ *Los Angeles Herald*, “MANHATTAN BEACH Another New Resort to Be Opened to the Public”, September 13, 1901.

⁶ Book of Deeds (Los Angeles), 1505, page 119.

⁷ *Los Angeles Times* (1886-1922); “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition”, Jun 27, 1912; pg. I15

⁸ *Liberator*, “Bruce Beach Front”, May 31, 1912, p. 5.

⁹ *Los Angeles Times* (1886-1922); “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition”, Jun 27, 1912; pg. I15

between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, it was the 50-year-old Willa who ran the business and interacted with guests.¹⁰

Within a week of opening, white landowners of “adjoining property” expressed agitation and began harassing guests¹¹. According to the *Times*, 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 Peck’s pier (at 34th Street¹²) to 24th street - property owned by George H. Peck, Jr. - forcing them to walk a half mile in each direction to get to the water.¹³ It is unclear if these signs were placed at Peck’s request or even with his knowledge.

Despite the impediments, Black bathers were undeterred and so was Mrs. Bruce. “Wherever we have tried to buy land for a beach resort we have been refused,” Mrs. Bruce told the *Times*, “but I own this land and I am going to keep it.”¹⁴

The Role of George H. Peck, Jr.

Manhattan Beach resident, Robert L. Brigham, whose 1956 thesis “Land Ownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach, California”, has served as a primary resource on the history of Bruce’s Beach, reported that George H. Lindsey, a white realtor and Manhattan Beach Resident, claimed that there had been a series of telegrams between Peck and his business associate/son-in-law Herb Culler regarding the Bruces and their guests. Lindsey told Brigham that the use of a long rope as a fence was the “direct result of telegrams between Culler and Peck”, who at the time was back east for business and allegedly told Culler to “do what he thought best.”¹⁵

It’s not possible to verify Lindsey’s accusation or Peck’s exact involvement, however, because we do not have access to those telegrams or any other record of such an exchange. Multiple sources, however, did state that there were barriers impeding access to the water from the Strand near the Bruces’ resort, which was owned by Peck at the time.

¹⁰ Jefferson, Alison Rose. “Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era.” University of Nebraska Press. 2020. P. 35.

¹¹ “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition” pg. I15.

¹² Peck’s Manhattan Beach Tract Map, Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

¹³ “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition”, pg. I15

¹⁴ “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition”, pg. I15

¹⁵ Brigham, p. 39.

A *Los Angeles Times* article written in 2002, 90 years after the Bruces' purchased their land, suggested that Peck took a proactive role in reserving and facilitating the sale of Manhattan Beach property to African Americans. According to the article, Peck "flouted tradition and set aside a two-block area fronting the ocean between 26th and 27th streets and Highland Avenue for minority residents."¹⁶ Furthermore, the wording of the current Bruce's Beach park plaque states that Peck "made it possible" for the beachfront property to be open to "all people". Following extensive review of government documents, newspaper articles, obituaries, interviews, and historian research from 1912 through the 1950s, there is no verifiable evidence from primary or other sources that Peck actually set aside land for this purpose or that he publicly objected to the harassment towards the Bruces and their guests following the development of their property.

1913-1924

As the popularity of the Bruces' resort grew within the Black community, some white residents of Manhattan Beach did not like it. In 1915, for example, H.D. Aron wrote to City Clerk Lewellyn Price requesting information on Lot 3, Block 5 in Peck's Manhattan Beach Tract -- three parcels north of the Bruces'. Price responded:

Confidentially, there is something about that block that is quite a detriment to the neighborhood, and that is that there is a colored family who live the year around on lot 8, which faces the ocean. Every so often they have a coon picnic and it is attended by about seventy-five to one-hundred-and-fifty coon pullman porters and their friends. You can imagine how much this would depreciate property values in that neighborhood. It is the only colored family that lives within the corporate limits of Manhattan. If it wasn't for that fact, I would consider this a bargain at about the assessed valuation.¹⁷

Despite any neighboring animosity, the Bruces' and their resort flourished. They were able to upgrade from their portable stand to a two-story brick building to accommodate more guests and provide more services.

On December 25, 1915, the Manhattan Beach News reported that "The negro population of Manhattan Beach... have had plans drawn for one of the finest apartment houses in

¹⁶ Rasmussen, Cecila. "Resort Was An Oasis for Blacks Until Racism Drove Them Out", Los Angeles Times, July 21, 2002. B.4.

¹⁷ City Clerk Correspondence between H.D. Aron and Lewellyn Price, October 18, 1915. Courtesy of the Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

this section of the beach.” It would be two stories and include 30 dressing rooms on the ground floor with completion by summer 1916. The white-plastered building with a red tile roof was to resemble the Sadler building at the Strand and Marine and was slated to cost \$6,000.¹⁸

During the period between 1919-1926, at least six other African Americans purchased property in close proximity to Bruce's resort, four of them between 26th and 27th streets (blocks 5 and 12 of Peck's Manhattan Beach tract)¹⁹.

In 1919, Major George and Mrs. Ethel Prioleau purchased the southern half of lot 4, block 12. The other half of their lot was purchased by Ms. Elizabeth Patterson in 1922. In 1923, Mrs. Mary Sanders bought lot 6, Block 12, as did Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna Johnson who had lot 1, Block 12.²⁰ Additionally, John McCaskill and Elisa L. Irvin as well that Mr. and Mrs. James Slaughter purchased property on the south side of 26th Street, across from the Bruce's. The remaining parcels of land in that area were owned by white property owners, and had not been developed by 1924.

In 1920, Mrs. Bruce expanded her property when she purchased Lot 9 in Block 5, the lot immediately to the south of their existing lot, for \$10 from Charles and Anna Krause and Jessie Caron Drake.²¹ In 1923, they allegedly built on it as well²². Bruce's Beach had become a popular destination for Black families, providing accommodations and services to enjoy a weekend on the coast.

¹⁸ “Apartment House At Peck Pavilion”, Manhattan Beach News, December 25, 1915. P. 4.

¹⁹ Jefferson, p. 37.

²⁰ This information was obtained from Brigham's thesis, p. 22. We have requested the deeds from the Assessor's Office, but are still waiting to receive them.

²¹ Book of Deeds (Los Angeles) 7351 p. 254.

²² Brigham, p. 17.

History of Bruce's Beach - Subcommittee Report - 02/21/2021

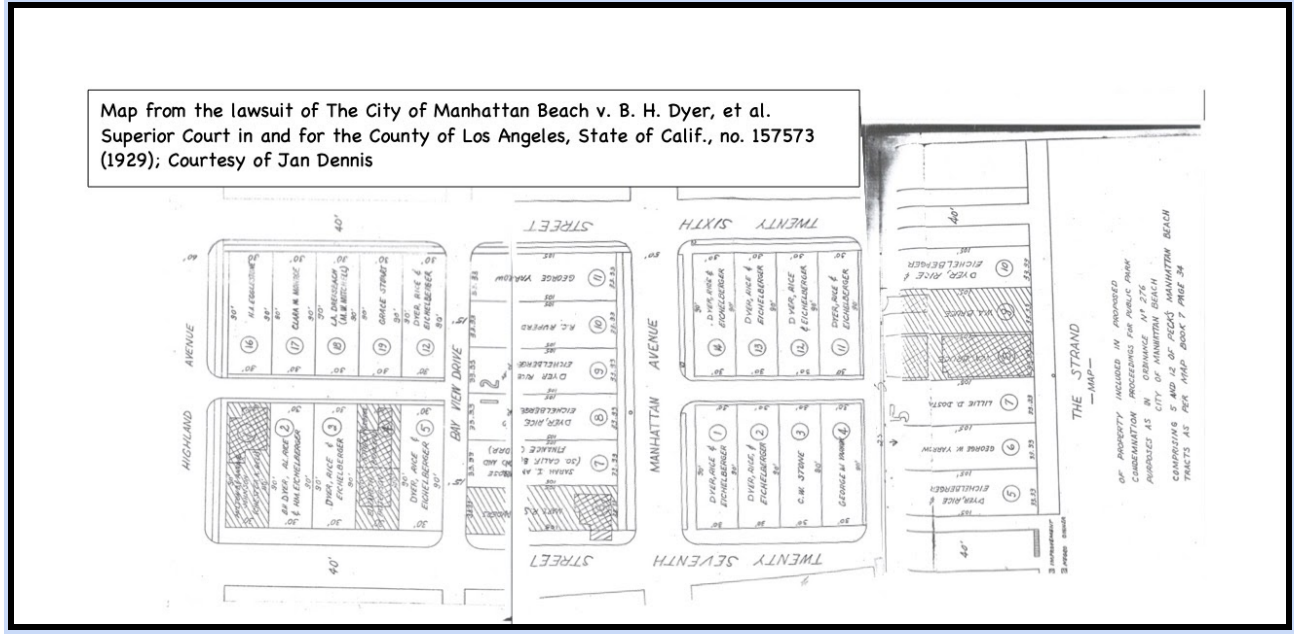


Photo Courtesy of the Manhattan Beach Historical Society

Miriam Matthews, Los Angeles’s first black librarian, said in an essay prepared for the California African American Museum, “You would take the Red Car down ... and spend a day on the beautiful beach or rent a room if you desired.”²³ Sundays were reserved for school gatherings and families, and the resort offered a getaway overlooking the Pacific

²³ Schoch, Deborah. “Erasing a Line Drawn in the Sand”, Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles, Calif. [Los Angeles, Calif]19 Mar 2007: B.1.

Ocean.” One guest remembered, "If one tired of the sand and surf, the parlor was available for listening to music or dancing.”²⁴

Per Robert Brigham and Dr. Alison Rose Jefferson, white neighbors resented the resort's growing popularity and prosperity of its African American owners by the early 1920s and were “concerned” about a “Negro ‘invasion’” and the impact it could have on property values. *(Note: Brigham only places the word “invasion” in quotes though it is unclear if that was a word used by Lindsey or by Brigham. Brigham frequently uses the phrase “Negro ‘invasion’” when describing the impetus for the condemnation proceedings.)*

The role of the KKK

It is also important to note that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was showing its influence in the area at that time. On January 12, 1924, *The Redondo Breeze* published an ad that invited readers to a free lecture on “The Principles of the KKK and Ideals of Pure Americanism.”²⁵ *The California Eagle*, a prominent African-American newspaper from 1879-1964, reported on the front page of its July 4, 1924, issue that the KKK was operating unrestricted along the waterfront.²⁶ Cited in the article was an incident in Redondo Beach where KKK pamphlets were handed out to Black fishermen KKK membership rolls included many civic leaders and policemen, including the mayors of LA and Redondo²⁷.

While there was no evidence directly linking acts of harassment to the KKK, many of Brigham's interviewees reported racially-motivated incidents by residents. In one instance, Hugh MacBeth, lawyer for Mrs. Sanders and the Johnsons, said air was let out of tires in cars parked near the Bruces' resort while owners were at the beach.²⁸ Cassius Robbins, a member of the 1924 Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees, claimed that one night he “followed a siren to Bruce's Lodge where someone (supposedly a Klansman) had set fire to a mattress under the main building.”²⁹ Mrs. Titus Alexander relayed a story of a Black-owned home on 23rd Street that was partially burned in 1926, allegedly by a white neighbor, upset that an African-American woman had purchased it.³⁰ Mrs. Ethel Atkinson reported fake “10 Minutes Only” parking signs that were posted to deter

²⁴ Schoch, B.1.

²⁵ Brigham, p. 41.

²⁶ “Klans Operations”, *The California Eagle*, Volume 39, No. 10, July 4, 1924, p. 1

²⁷ Links Inglewood raid and others forthcoming

²⁸ Brigham, p. 40.

²⁹ Brigham, p. 41.

³⁰ Brigham, p. 77.

History of Bruce's Beach - Subcommittee Report - 02/21/2021

out-of-town Blacks from visiting the resort, and also said that a cross was burned in the hill above a Black-owned home.³¹

Despite this harassment, Black residents and guests did not cease coming to the beach. According to reports from the *California Eagle*, it was just as popular as ever.

In the social ledger of Manhattan Beach will be found a most unique bathing party given by Mesdames Viola Smith, Bessie McCatskill and Carrie Irvn. At 10 o'clock the guests beg an to arrive at the cozy little beach home of the "Irvins and McCatskill's". After arriving each one was busy attiring herself in a most attractive bathing suit, cap and shoes for a dip in the ocean. Bathing was enjoyed until 2 o'clock P. M. when the guests were ushered into the canopied room where the tables were laden with all kinds of "goodies". The remainder of the afternoon was spent in sewing and dancing. The guests included Mesdames Adams of San Jose, D. Irving of San Francisco, and the Modern Priscilla Club, declared their hostess as ideal.

From the *California Eagle*, September 11, 1925

Complaint of Condemnation: 1924-1929

George Lindsey³², a real estate agent in the North End of Manhattan Beach who arrived in the town in 1920, played a major role initiating the series of events leading to the condemnation and seizure of property from Black families residing near the Bruces' lodge. Brigham later interviewed Mr. Lindsey, who indicated that white landowners feared an "invasion" by members of the African American community.³³ Lindsey told Brigham that "education and co-operation will eventually solve the problem... perhaps in five hundred years or so" and until that time, he was serving the community by working toward a peaceful end to the "negro 'invasion'".

Lindsey allegedly approached the Board of Trustees (now known as the City Council) in 1921, requesting action to discourage African Americans from establishing residency in Manhattan Beach. Brigham wrote: "Although sympathetic, the members of [the Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees] were reluctant to take action lest they go on record as being bigots."³⁴

³¹ Brigham, p. 82.

³² U.S., *Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

³³ Brigham, p. 44.

³⁴ Brigham, p. 44

In a 1987 letter to the *Beach Reporter*, longtime Manhattan Beach resident Helen Sinsabaugh wrote that Lindsey was concerned over “some highly irregular real estate activities certain agents were operating among people in inland areas occupied by blacks.”³⁵ Sinsabaugh, who lived at 2212 The Strand and was about 14 years old³⁶ at the time condemnation proceedings began, said that the realtor and other civic leaders were concerned about growing racial tensions in the community and met with “black leaders such as church pastors” to discuss the situation.³⁷

Lindsey discovered a legal means by which to shut down the Bruces' resort through the Park and Playground Act of 1909. Sinsabaugh wrote that Lindsey learned of the “possibility of condemnation procedures for recreational civic use” through a series of real estate courses he had taken at USC. He and “several civic leaders” circulated a petition for support of this action and presented it to the Board on November 15, 1923.³⁸

On January 3, 1924, the Manhattan Beach City Council passed ordinance 263, claiming eminent domain for a public park. Although it has been said that Live Oak Park had just been built nearby, the truth is that both the land between Highland and the Strand, 26th and 27th was being developed for a park at the same time as Live Oak Park. (Please see [The History of the Park](#) for further explanation.)

On June 19, 1924, Manhattan Beach enacted new laws with fines and penalties for violating ordinances (273-275) that prohibited new or additional development of bath houses and commercialized amusements near the Strand without Board of Trustee approval, and banning dressing/undressing in cars, tents, and temporary structures. Although these ordinances did not impact the Bruces' existing resort, they were clearly designed to prevent any further development in Manhattan Beach by the Bruces or other African-Americans. On the same day, ordinance 276 passed unanimously; identical to ordinance 263, it indicated the intent for condemnation. Protests against the condemnation were deemed insufficient and dismissed.³⁹

On October 16, 1924, Manhattan Beach officials passed ordinance 282, which initiated legal proceedings for “acquisition by condemnation for public park purposes of Blocks five (5) and twelve (12) of Peck's Manhattan Beach Tract...” In November, 1924, the city filed a lawsuit pursuing condemnation, which covered 30 lots. Five of these were owned

³⁵ Helen A. Sinsabaugh, letter. *The Beach Reporter*. (1987)

³⁶ Year: 1920; Census Place: *Manhattan Beach, Los Angeles, California*; Roll: T625_118; Page: 2A; Enumeration District: 542

³⁷ Sinsabaugh, letter.

³⁸ Brigham, p. 45.

³⁹ “Important Business at Council: All Park Protests Denied.” *Manhattan Beach News*. September 19, 1924. P. 1

History of Bruce's Beach - Subcommittee Report - 02/21/2021

by African American families, including their cottages and the Bruce's Lodge. The remaining 25 lots had no structures and were owned by white landowners. The Bruces, along with three other African American families sued the City of Manhattan Beach for racial discrimination in 1924.⁴⁰ (This statement warrants further research because the source is unclear if this was a separate lawsuit from the complaint of condemnation proceedings. A request for the files of the lawsuit is still pending.)

The *California Eagle* printed a letter from E. Burton Ceruti, Attorney for the L.A. Branch, N.A.A.C.P. on July 11, 1924, wherein he stated that Mrs. Bruce was "willing to sell her property and, even if a suit be instituted, would sell at a fair price at any time, and would abandon the suit at such time."⁴¹ By December, they had entered into the condemnation proceedings with Attorney Willis O. Tyler as their lawyer.⁴²

On February 4, 1927, the *Manhattan Beach News* published a front page article about a petition submitted by the Taxpayers Protective League to recall the Board of Trustees for a number of legislative actions related to development along the Strand, as well as the park and playground proceedings. A letter signed by C.A. Bruce, Willa Bruce and Harvey Bruce was presented in an adjacent article. In this letter, the Bruces express that "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." They went on to write that as taxpayers, this "hardship" targeting them was inconsistent with the "economy in expenditure of public money" and that the park is not filling any public need.⁴³

In exchange for water service to North Manhattan, George Peck donated 2 beach lots to the city in 1927. These lots were then "leased" to Oscar Bessonette; it was later revealed that no rent was ever collected.⁴⁴

On May 16, 1927, the Bruces sent a letter to the City of Manhattan Beach whereby they turned over their "property and all improvements thereon and consent that you forthwith wreck, tear down and remove the building on said lots."⁴⁵

In their original answer to the complaint of condemnation, Brigham reports that the Bruces requested \$70,000 for their property and \$50,000 in damages "due to the fact that if the property were condemned, they would be unable to purchase elsewhere in

⁴⁰ Rassmussen.

⁴¹ *California Eagle*. Ceruti, E. Burton. "Matter of Bruce's Beach", July 11, 1924, pp. 1 and 10.

⁴² *California Eagle*. "Bruce's Beach Fights Condemnation", December 26, 1924, p. 1.

⁴³ *The Beach Reporter*, April 16, 1927

⁴⁴ Brigham, p. 85.

⁴⁵ Letter to the City of Manhattan Beach from Willie A. Bruce and Charles A. Bruce, May 16, 1927. Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

History of Bruce's Beach - Subcommittee Report - 02/21/2021

Manhattan.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, they were granted \$14,500. They did not stay in Manhattan Beach.

(Note: We are still in the process of trying to acquire the files from the lawsuit -- especially as they were so heavily referenced in Brigham's thesis. When we have that information, we will update this document.)

A final judgement on the condemnation proceedings was delivered on June 10, 1929.⁴⁷ The amount granted to each of the condemned property holders are from the following table in Brigham's thesis:

⁴⁶ Brigham, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Brigham, p. 67.

TABLE III
AMOUNTS GRANTED IN FINAL JUDGEMENT
TO HOLDERS OF CONDEMNED PROPERTY*

<u>Owner</u>	<u>Property</u>	<u>Settlement</u>
B. H. Dyer, R. L. Rice, and H. M. Eichelberger	Lots 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, Blk. 5. Lots 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, and 12, Blk. 12.	\$21,147.31
C. W. Stone	Lot 3, Blk. 5.	1,325.71
Geo. W. Yarrow	Lots 4 and 6, Blk. 5. Lot 11, Blk. 12.	6,461.13
Lillie D. Dosta	Lot 7, Blk. 5.	2,911.23
W. A. Bruce	Lots 8 and 9, Blk. 5.	14,500.00
M. B. Johnson	Lot 1, Blk. 12.	1,273.04
Anna E. Johnson	Lot 1, Blk. 12.	1,273.04
Emma K. Barnett	Lot 1, Blk. 12.	1,342.08
Elizabeth Patterson	No. 1/2 Lot 4, Blk. 12.	1,865.66
Geo. and Ethel Prioleau	So. 1/2 Lot 4, Blk. 12.	1,874.37
Mary R. Sanders	Lot 6, Blk. 12.	4,129.09
Sarah I. Ambrose	Lot 7, Blk. 12.	1,075.00**
Marion R. Wyser	Lot 7, Blk. 12.	75.00
So. Calif. Bond and Finance Corp.	Lot 7, Blk. 12.	128.09

*Satisfaction of Judgement, The City of Manhattan Beach v. B. H. Dyer, et al.

**Amount of settlement not shown in Satisfaction of Judgement. This estimated amount is based upon award made at time of Interlocutory Decree.

TABLE III
(continued)

<u>Owner</u>	<u>Property</u>	<u>Settlement</u>
R. C. Ruperd	Lot 10, Blk. 12.	1,565.08
Grace Stuart	Lot 13, Blk. 12.	1,200.00
L. A. Dreisbach	Lot 14, Blk. 12.	913.95
M. W. Mitchell	Lot 14, Blk. 12.	25.00
Clara M. Monroe (Darlington)	Lot 15, Blk. 12.	1,200.00
H. A. Ecclestone	Lot 16, Blk. 12.	1,755.85
<hr/>		
TOTAL		\$66,040.63

NAACP Swim-In

Black families were still coming to Bruce's Beach even though police were now arresting them as “trespassers.” On July 4, 1927, a 19-year-old Black UCLA student, Elizabeth Catley, was arrested for swimming and “trespassing” on the “private beach.”⁴⁸ Manhattan Beach police refused to allow her to change into dry clothes and kept her in jail for five hours. In response, the newly formed Los Angeles chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held their first peaceful protest on July 17, 1927, which was dubbed a “swim in.”⁴⁹ The lawyer for the NAACP, Hugh Macbeth, was able to obtain admissions from police officers, Bessonette, and Trustees that the signs were meant only to deter Blacks, prompting the force of signs' removal. The next day, the California Eagle's banner headline crowed: “NAACP Wins Beach Victory.”⁵⁰

After 1929

Frank Daugherty, one of the three original subdividers in Manhattan Beach (in addition to George Peck and John Merrill), was interviewed for a four-part essay entitled “A History of Manhattan.” In one excerpt published in the Manhattan Beach News on February 19, 1943 and reprinted on July 20, 1945 in the Redondo Reflex, Daugherty discussed the racist motivations behind the condemnation of the Bruce's land. “We tried to buy them out but they would not sell. There were several families in the blocks between 26th and 27th streets....We had to acquire these two blocks to solve the problem, so we voted to condemn them, and build a city park there. We had to protect ourselves. Our attorneys advised the members of the council never to admit the real purpose in establishing the park, especially during the city council meeting.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ *California Eagle*. “Jailed for Bathing.” Friday, July 8, 1927.

⁴⁹ Brigham, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Brigham, p. 93.

⁵¹ “Negroes and Pier Building Were Manhattan Problems,” *Manhattan Beach News*, February 19, 1943, pp. 1 and 6.

The History of the Park

After the city condemned the land for a new park in place of the former resort, historic folklore says that the land sat empty for 30 years. Manhattan Beach resident, Robert Brigham, remembered looking at the empty lots during the 1940s and 1950s. They were covered with weeds and empty soda bottles.



Photo Courtesy of the Manhattan Beach Historical Society

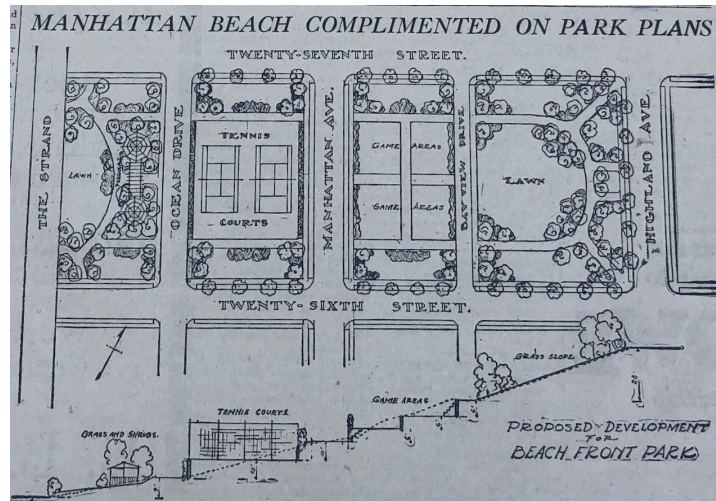
Beginning in 1932, however, Manhattan Beach City Council had petitioned the county for assistance in funding both the City Park between the Strand and Highland, and Live Oak Park off what was then called Railroad Drive. They hoped to use labor supplied by the County Welfare and Stabilization Program.⁵²

In February, 1933, the City of Manhattan Beach filed plans to utilize funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to build a beachfront park. The resolutions asked the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for 2580 “man days” for the improvement of the City Park, “being the block between Manhattan Avenue and Ocean Drive, 26th and 27th.” For the block between The Strand and Ocean, 1300 “man days” were requested, and between Manhattan Avenue and Bay View, 2400. The block between Bay View and Highland needed 2267 “man days”.⁵³

⁵² Minutes of the City Council Meeting of the City of Manhattan Beach. July 21, 1932.

⁵³ Minutes of the City Council Meeting of the City of Manhattan Beach. February 2, 1933.

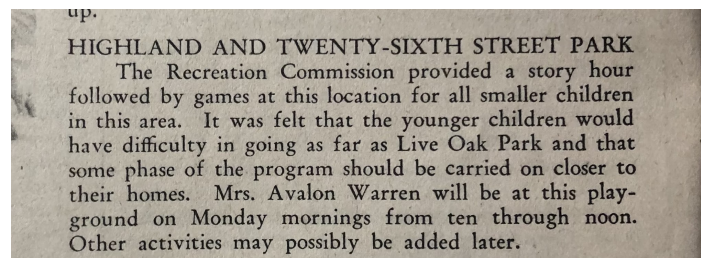
History of Bruce's Beach - Subcommittee Report - 02/21/2021



From the Manhattan Beach News, March 17, 1933.

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.”⁵⁴

An 1945 issue of *Community Life* magazine, describes a children's story hour located at the playground at Highland and 26th st Park.⁵⁵



A *South Bay Breeze* newspaper article published November 9, 1954 reported on a joint session between the City Council and the Recreation Commission discussing the development of park plans. By 1956, the area was landscaped into a terraced park that absorbed a portion of Bayview Drive.

The site was referred to as City Park and Beach Front Park until 1962, when the Kiwanis Club and the Manhattan Beach City Council sponsored a naming contest. The chosen name was Bayview Terrace Park.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Manhattan Beach News*, “Progress is Evident in Park Work”, August 11, 1933, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Community Life*, 1945

⁵⁶ *South Bay Breeze*, November 9, 1954

After a failed effort to change the name of 15th street to Calle Culiacan at the February 5, 1974 City Council meeting, during the February 19, 1974 meeting, the Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee requested the city rename the park “Culiacan Terrace Park or its Spanish equivalent”. This was done before the “in view of the impending visit of Culiacan representatives for the change of officers on the city council and to make them feel more a part of the cultural exchange.” Parque Culiacan was designated on March 16, 1974.⁵⁷

In 1988, the mayor of Culiacan, Mexico no longer supported the Sister Cities Program, and dropped Manhattan Beach as their sister city. In 1989, a new sister city was established with Santa Rosalia of Baja California, Mexico.⁵⁸

On February 15, 2003, a group from Leadership Manhattan Beach, a community leadership program, proposed a class project called “Facts on Plaques”, a series of historical facts placed on plaques near points of interest. Class member Mark Davis also proposed a communitywide contest to rename Parque Culiacan with a name more relevant to the community. The council approved the project with the directive that the park not be named after an individual.⁵⁹

On April 15, 2003, the Leadership class returned to the City Council with the recommendation of renaming Parque Culiacan to Friendship Park. During the meeting, the Sister City Organization representatives protested the recommendation and stated that it was inappropriate to drop the original Sister City's name Culiacan from the park. The City Council unanimously denied the recommendation of Friendship Park.⁶⁰

The council accepted a donation of \$3,600 from The Leadership Manhattan Class of 2003 and instructed staff to work with Leadership to develop a sign including all the history of Parque Culiacan.⁶¹

At the City Council Meeting on May 6, 2003, Sandra Seville-Jones, co-manager of Leadership Manhattan Beach, presented wording based on the extensive research completed by Leadership. Councilmember Ward suggested deleting the word “tragic” from the plaque wording. However, Ms. Seville-Jones felt that the documentation supported the use of the word and it was an important factor in the emotional impact of the statement.⁶² The final text read:

⁵⁷ MB City Council Minutes, February 19, 1974

⁵⁸ Parks & Recreation Minutes February 27, 2006

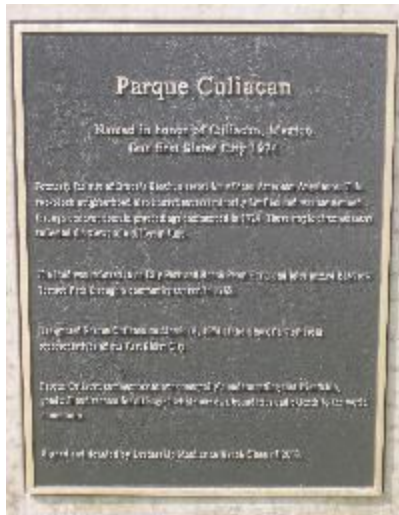
⁵⁹ MB City Council Minutes, February 18, 2003, Agenda Item 13

⁶⁰ MB City Council Minutes, April 15, 2003, Agenda Item 15, pg 6

⁶¹ MB City Council Minutes, April 15, 2003, Agenda Item 15, pg 7

⁶² MB City Council Minutes, May 6, 2003, Agenda Item 6.19, pg. 5

Parque Culiacan Named in honor of Culiacan, Mexico Our first Sister City 1974 Formerly the site of Bruce's Beach, a resort for African American Angelinos. This two block neighborhood also housed several minority families and was condemned through eminent domain proceedings commenced in 1924. Those tragic circumstances reflected the views of a different time. Signed and donated by Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003.



Two years later, in December 2005, renaming the park was brought up again during MB City Council audience participation. Rosa Parks had died in October, 2005 prompting Manhattan Beach resident and activist, Patrick McBride, to request that the park be named after her as symbolic of the civil rights issues related to the park's history. Mr. McBride stated that Bob Brigham was also in support of remaining the park in honor of Rosa Parks. In response to Mr. McBride's comment, Mayor Fahey felt strongly that a name that addresses the history of the area would have more meaning than Parque Culican. Mayor Fahey asked the council if there was support for discussing changing the name of Parque Culican; Mayor ProTem Ward said he "didn't have any problem with discussing it" and City Manager Dolan suggested it be referred to Parks and Recreation for consideration and discussion before city council agendize it.⁶³

Parks and Recreation met on February 27, 2006. Community member Patrick McBride spoke during audience participation on the history of Bruce's Beach and Rosa Parks. Parks Commissioner Lear agreed with other Commissioners and would be open-minded about considering a new park name that has a much more localized connection to the Manhattan Beach community, i.e. Bruce's Beach. The meeting minutes note that, "The Commission has an interest in sending the message that Manhattan Beach stands for,

⁶³ Manhattan Beach City Council Meeting recording, December 6, 2005

amongst other things, diversity and recognizing that the greatest blemish in our history is the events of the 1920s at Bruce's Beach". Commissioner Lear commended Mr. McBride's noble effort to communicate to the world that the City of Manhattan Beach stands for diversity and good will. The Commission voted against changing the name to Rosa Parks Park.⁶⁴

At the conclusion of the Manhattan Beach City Council meeting on April 18, 2006, during other council business, Mayor Mitch Ward, supported by Mayor ProTem Nick Tell and Councilmember Joyce Fahey, directed the Parks and Rec Department to look into renaming Parque Culican, with specific direction to look at the historical aspects of the area.⁶⁵

The Parks and Recreation committee met on May 22, 2006. During audience participation, community members suggested keeping the name Parque Culiacan as well as the names Forgiving Park, Ocean View Park, Surf View Park and Bayview Terrace. Community member Patrick McBride suggested that the park's history had a huge civil rights significance, thus renaming the park Bruce's Beach would signify the historical relevance. Mr. McBride suggested that a lot of people think we should honor the Bruce Family and he suggested the city should honor the symbol that they stood for and the historical struggle that took place. Commissioner Paralusz agreed that the City Council's direction was to consider renaming the park to reflect historical events. Commissioner Paralusz was in favor of renaming the park Bruce's Beach to recognize our City's history. She suggested that we can't go back and change what happened, but could certainly address what had happened. Commissioner Paralusz then made a motion to recommend to the City Council in favor of changing the name Parque Culican to Bruce's Beach. The Committee voted 4-2 (Ayes: Cohen, Paralusz, Gill, Lamb; Nays: Harris, Lear)⁶⁶

At the City Council meeting on July 6, 2006, Parks and Recreation brought their recommendation of renaming Parque Culican to Bruce's Park or Bruce's Beach Park before council. Mayor Mitch Ward suggested that the discussion should be about the history of the land rather than the Bruce family, and referred to the role of the Bruce family as the "movement the Bruce family created as a result of George Peck". He shared an article from The Observer that invoked a portrayal of George H. Peck, as a generous businessman who helped his black neighbors in "bucking the practice of racial exclusion, opened up 2 blocks of land on the beach for African Americans to purchase."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ MB Parks and Recreation Meeting Minutes, February 27, 2006

⁶⁵ Manhattan Beach City Council Meeting recording, April 18, 2006

⁶⁶ MB Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes, May 22, 2006

⁶⁷ MB City Council Minutes & Recording, July 5, 2006

Residents gave emotional speeches during audience participation. Many of the name change supporters wore large paper hearts with “BB” written on them. Resident Oliver Coker read a letter on behalf of his wife, Lillian Light, saying this was “a chance to right a wrong and honor the Bruce Family... This name would make a statement that ‘we citizens of Manhattan Beach strongly oppose such acts of racial discrimination and will never again allow such acts to occur here.’” Resident Gail Runk said “history must never die because if history dies, the future dies with it. We have an opportunity to honor the past here...for the history the Bruce family enriched our city with.” Resident Patrick McBride, who started the name change discussion 6 months prior, and spoke on its behalf at every meeting, noted the name change also highlighted the significance of the non-violent protest by Elizabeth Catley, the NAACP, and the movement it inspired.⁶⁸

Mayor Ward said he supported the name change because he wanted to “honor the founder of this city, George Peck, for the vision that he had.” He felt it was a grave error to not recognize the true importance of the land. Mayor Pro Tem Tell indicated he would support changing the name of the park to Bruce's Beach. Mayor Mitch Ward made a motion, and Mayor Pro Tem Nick Tell seconded the motion. Councilmembers Jim Aldinger and Richard Montgomery voted against the name change. With the deciding vote, Councilmember Joyce Fahey voted in favor of changing the name to Bruce's Beach.⁶⁹

On November 8, 2006, city staff presented a report to the Manhattan Beach City Council suggesting text for the new plaque at Bruce's Beach park and asking for \$8,000 to be allocated from the City Council contingency fund. Manhattan Beach resident, Patrick McBride, asked for the item to be pulled from the consent calendar for discussion. During the discussion, McBride expressed concerns about where the plaque wording came from and why experts such as Robert Brigham and Alison Jefferson had not been consulted about the plaque wording. He was also concerned that significant history was not represented. Councilmember Ward stated that a complete history was unnecessary. Council Member Joyce Fahey and Mayor Nick Tell pushed for the inclusion of George Peck in the opening sentence of the plaque wording. Staff was directed to modify the wording to include historical information about George Peck and Bruce's Beach being the only beach open to African Americans at that time.⁷⁰

At the December 5, 2006 meeting, community member Patrick McBride, spoke and once again expressed concern regarding the accuracy of the history reflected in the plaque wording and the need for more time and consideration. He had shared the

⁶⁸ MB City Council Recording, July 5, 2006

⁶⁹ MB City Council Minutes & Recording, July 5, 2006

⁷⁰ MB City Council Minutes & Recording, November 8, 2006

plaque wording with the Center for Law in the Public Interest, a Los Angeles Civil Rights Firm. They were in disagreement with the plaque wording and felt that the driving out of the families was important to include. The council felt strongly that the focus remains on the positive. Mr. McBride shared that several months ago the Center had offered to help the city to raise money for an art piece and to help draw attention to the area and its historical significance. Councilmember Ward and Councilmember Aldinger served on the subcommittee to review the text.⁷¹

Despite the concerns raised by Mr. McBride, the final wording was unanimously approved by council on December 5, 2006:

Bruce's Beach

In 1912, Mr. George Peck, one of our community's co-founders, made it possible for the beach area below this site to be developed as Bruce's Beach, the only beach resort in Los Angeles County for all people. Charles and Willa Bruce were the African American entrepreneurs who settled here, thus the name Bruce's Beach. This two-block neighborhood was home to several minority families and was condemned through eminent domain proceedings commenced in 1924. Those tragic circumstances reflected the views of a different time. The land was referred to as City Park and Beach Front Park and later named Bayview Terrace Park through a community contest in 1962. The park was designated Parque Culiacan on March 16, 1974, at the time of a visit from representatives of our first Sister City. The Manhattan Beach City Council renamed the park as Bruce's Beach in July 2006, commemorating our community's understanding that friendship, goodwill and respect for all begins within our own boundaries and extends to the world community. All are welcome. A project of Leadership Manhattan Beach Class of 2003.

⁷¹ MB City Council Recording, December 5, 2006

WORKS CITED

BOOKS

Jefferson, Alison Rose. "Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era." University of Nebraska Press. 2020.

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter to the City of Manhattan Beach from Willie A. Bruce and Charles A. Bruce, May 16, 1927. Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

City Clerk Correspondence between Lewellyn Price and H.D. Aron, October 15-16, 1915. Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

MAPS

Peck's Manhattan Beach Tract Map, Manhattan Beach Historical Society.

MINUTES FROM MANHATTAN BEACH CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

February 19, 1974

February 18, 2003

April 15, 2003

May 6, 2003

December 6, 2005

July 5, 2006

April 18, 2006

November 8, 2006

December 5, 2006

MINUTES OF THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,

Minutes of the Office of the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County, California, Monday, December 2, 1912.

MINUTES FROM THE MANHATTAN BEACH PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING

February 27, 2006

May 22, 2006

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

- “Apartment House At Peck Pavilion”, Manhattan Beach News, December 25, 1915. P. 4.
- “Bruce Beach Front”, The Liberator, May 31, 1912, p. 5.
- The California Eagle. June, 1924.
- *The Beach Reporter*, April 16, 1987
- “Colored People’s Resort Meets With Opposition”, Los Angeles Times (1886-1922); Jun 27, 1912; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. I15
- “Important Business at Council: All Park Protests Denied.” Manhattan Beach News. September 19, 1924. P. 1
- “Negroes and Pier Building Were Manhattan Problems,” Manhattan Beach News, February 19, 1943, pp. 1 and 6.
- Rasmussen, Cecila. “Resort Was An Oasis for Blacks Until Racism Drove Them Out”, Los Angeles Times, July 21, 2002. B.4.
- [Schoch, Deborah](#). “Erasing a Line Drawn in the Sand”, Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles, Calif. [Los Angeles, Calif]19 Mar 2007: B.1.
- Sinsabaugh, Helen A. letter. *The Beach Reporter*. (1987)
- South Bay Breeze, November 9, 1954
- *Links Inglewood raid and others forthcoming*

UNITED STATES CENSUS

- Year: 1900; Census Place: *Albuquerque, Bernalillo, New Mexico*; Page: 6; Enumeration District: 0009; FHL microfilm: 1240999
 - Year: 1910; Census Place: *Los Angeles Assembly District 71, Los Angeles, California*; Roll: T624_81; Page: 9A; Enumeration District: 0130; FHL microfilm: 1374094
 - Year: 1920; Census Place: *Manhattan Beach, Los Angeles, California*; Roll: T625_118; Page: 2A; Enumeration District: 542
- U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

PUBLISHED DISSERTATION

Brigham, Robert L. “Land Ownership And Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach, CA,” diss., Fresno State College, May, 1956, p. 17.