

Historic Resources Board Huntington Beach

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by the

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Bibliography

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Huntington Beach Historic Downtown of A Walking Tour

Welcome to downtown Huntington Beach, a city with a history spanning centuries. Nicknamed "Surf City USA" for its over eight miles of beaches and breaking surf, Huntington Beach features one of the largest recreational piers in the world, public parks, riding stables and equestrian trails, a marina, a wildlife preserve and an eight-mile biking, inline skating, jogging and walking trail along the ocean.

Downtown Huntington Beach has a history beginning as a sleepy beach, agricultural town in the 1920s to today's vacationers' paradise. The city's evolution can be experienced on this walking tour through its eclectic array of buildings and sites. We invite you to take this mile and a half peek into the past and experience the history for yourself.

Bridging the Past

to the Future

Early Inhabitants

Nine thousand years before Huntington Beach (HB) became Surf City USA, or even Huntington Beach, this area was inhabited by descendants of Asian nomads who crossed the Bering Straights and migrated down the North American continent along the west coast. This was more than three thousand years before the pyramids were built in Egypt, and even predates England's Stonehenge. These first visitors to Huntington Beach found a warm climate, food and water.



At Bolsa Chica in HB over 1000 cogstones made from a variety of materials have been found. It is not known when these stones came into use but the making of them seems to have stopped around 3500 B.C. Also unknown is the function of the cogstones although their good condition suggests they may have been used for ceremonial or religious purposes.

The Tongva people, also known as Gabrielinos, whose lands stretched from Topanga Canyon in Los Angeles to Aliso Creek in Laguna Beach were the latest native peoples to inhabit the area. No one knows exactly when they first moved here, with dates ranging widely from 500 A.D. to as early as 1500 B.C. The Tongva people belonged to a language stock known as Shoshonean.

European Settlement

While the explorer Juan Cabrillo claimed the area for Spain as early as 1542, European settlement can be traced to a Spanish soldier, Manuel Nieto, who in 1784 received a Spanish land grant of 300,000 acres as a reward for military services. Later Rancho Los Nietos, as he named his grant, was bought by Abel



Stearns and became the Stearns Rancho Company in the 1850s. The company raised cattle and horses in Huntington Beach. In fact, Beach Boulevard was originally a cattle route. As cattle ranching declined, it was replaced by agriculture because the presence of peat in the wet soil made HB a fertile place for farming.

The 20th Century

The first city name in the 20th century was Shell Beach for the littleneck clams in the sand. Later it became Pacific City when a group of investors, the West Coast Land and Water Company (WCLW) started promoting real estate and tourism. They envisioned a West Coast Atlantic City here. However by 1902 the



Huntington Beach Company (led by Henry Huntington) purchased Pacific City from WCLW. After that WCLW retained a few lots, but was no longer part of the city

development. The HB Company, after the purchase, entered into an agreement with the Pacific Electric Company, owner of the Red Cars, to bring the electric rail through HB. With this, the city's name officially became Huntington Beach.

On July 4, 1904, the city's first Independence Day Parade took place, starting the city's longest-held community tradition. The parade commemorated the arrival of the first electric passenger train.

Incorporated in 1909, the city might have been a sleepy, agricultural beach resort town for years if it weren't for Standard Oil of California's "Discovery Well" on May 24, 1920. Hundreds of oil wells sprang up almost over night and the city went from sleepy to sizzling. The population leapt from 1500 residents to 7500 in just three months. Tent cities were erected and more tiny cottages were slapped together to house oil workers. At the same time, houses and other structures were razed or moved to other



parts of town to allow for in-city drilling. Some houses were bought directly from the Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926, where for as low as \$672 you could buy a five-room house kit, pick it up from a railway and either assemble the whole house yourself or hire someone to do it. Previously some lots were given away with the purchase of a set of encyclopedias.

The city went through a crisis during the Great Depression in 1929, followed by the devastating Long Beach Earthquake of 1933. There was a tragic flood in 1938 and in 1939 a hurricane destroyed a 300-foot section of the pier.

After a final oil strike in 1953, the fire department began clearing out oil derricks within the city and the coast to make room for the population explosion. Douglas Space Center opened in 1963 in north Huntington Beach. By 1965, with approximately 6,800 employees, McDonnell Douglas had the largest payroll in the city. Beginning in the late 1950s and continuing into the 1970s, Huntington Beach became one of the fastest growing cities in the US.

All the while, surfing in Huntington Beach grew along with the town. The first documented exhibition was at the Municipal Pier Inaugural Celebration in June 1914. George Freeth, a Hawaiian of Irish descent, was billed as the "man who can walk on water" for the event. In the 1920s, Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku, a multiple Gold Medal Olympian considered the father of surfing, surfed under the HB pier. He was the first surfer inducted into the Surfing Hall of Fame. In 1955, the city's first surf shop Gordie's Surf Boards, opened under the



pier. Four years later, the West Coast Surfing Championships, forerunner of the OP Pro and US Open of Surfing, were held in Huntington Beach. Known as Surf City USA, since the heyday of the sport, the title became official in 2004.

Now Get Ready To Step Back In Time And Enjoy The Walk

1. Begin at the Visitors Information Kiosk at the foot of the Huntington Beach pier.

2. The Huntington Beach (HB) pier has had a tumultuous history, from its beginnings in 1904 as an uncreosoted rough pine construction to the one seen today that was dedicated in 1992 and is the longest concrete municipal pier in the U.S. In the past, Pacific storms destroyed the pier and buildings on it three times, in 1914, 1938 and 1983. In the early 1900s the Pacific Electric (PE) Railway Building near the pier was a stop for PE's Red Cars. Railroad mogul Henry Huntington ensured the cars ran through Huntington Beach to Newport Beach. In 1910 a Saltwater



Plunge and bath house were constructed at the current site of Pier Plaza. The first trailer campground in the nation was located to the left of the pier.

3. In 1939 the Pavalon Ballroom was erected where Duke's Restaurant now stands. In 1947 a Fun Zone complete with a Ferris wheel and other attractions were added on the site of what is now the pier memorial plaque.



4. In 1905 the Huntington Beach Company had offices in this block. Headed by Henry Huntington, the company was responsible for much of the early development of the city. By 1910, this block also contained the Ocean Wave Hotel, with the Crescent Theater located below the hotel. The only original building, circa 1905, still remaining houses the El

Don liquor store and Papa Joe's Pizza. Eight original apartments on the second floor are still rented out.

5. On 5th St. the entrance to the Shorebreak Hotel was once the site of the legendary Surf Theatre. Built in 1925, it was originally called Scott's Theater then the Roxie. In 1941 it became the Surf Theater, but was demolished in the mid-1970s to allow for future development. Seats from the theater can be seen later in the tour at the Surfing Museum.

6. The M.E. Helme House Furnishing Co. building, built in 1904, is an example of early 20th Century Western False Front architecture. The great granddaughter of Matthew Helme and her husband run the antique store there, and live in the Helme/Worthy house. Both Helme buildings are listed on The National Registry. Look down at the rings for hitching the horses.

7. At 128 6th Street is the Helme/Worthy House, an example of modified Queen Anne Clapboard architecture, built in 1901 in Santa Ana. Matthew Helme purchased the house in 1904 and moved it here. He was a member of the first board of trustees in Huntington Beach and its fourth mayor. Helme fought for the city's incorporation and worked for the development of a fire department, street lighting and a water system. The building is being renovated by the Worthy family, who still lives there.



8. Examples of California Bungalow architecture built in 1922 are seen at 215 8th St and 227 8th St. Bungalows like these once filled the downtown area. Notice the capped off blue oil well and oil tank behind the fence.

9. On 310 8th Street and Olive Street is The First Church of Christ Science building constructed in 1928. It is an example of Period Revival Church architecture. The grass parking lot was patterned after grass lots at Knott's Berry Farm.

10. The spacious Evangeline Hotel at 421 8th St. was built in 1905. This Craftsman-style building opened in



1906 as an elegant 18-room hotel. Civil War veterans who attended the Grand Army of the Republic gatherings often stayed here. At the end of the 20th century, it was a youth hostel.

11. 504 7th St. was built in 1905 and originally had a barn in back. The palm tree in front was planted in 1905 and continues to thrive. Notice the original concrete block sidewalk and the writing, Magnolia Ave, in cement.



12. The Mid-Century Modern Main Street Library was built in 1951 and designed by the Los Angeles architecture firm of McLellan, MacDonald and Markwith. It features a marble entrance, floor-to-ceiling windows and is one of the first examples of innovative concrete tilt-up construction. A grandfather clock in the



library was built by the HB High School Class of 1915. Bernard Schecter has been coming in for over 17 years to wind it weekly.

13. The library sits on Triangle Park. First used as a park in 1912, it was a baseball diamond surrounded by signboards with advertisements promoting the city. It was deeded to HB in 1917 by the Huntington Beach Company.

14. Notice the beach cottage at 415 6th St. It was moved to this site from the oil fields in the 1930s. Many houses were moved for safety from dangerous oil fires or to make way for more drilling.

15. The Community Bible Church, originally known as the First Baptist Church, was dedicated in 1906, three years before HB was incorporated. This is one of the oldest churches still standing in the city.



16. The Beach Court at 323-327 6th St. and other courts like it provided residences during the rapid period of growth in the oil boom industry. These courts, built in 1923, are examples of Spanish Colonial Revival



architecture. Silent film star Rudolph Valentino is said to haunt this court.

17. The 1910 Craftsman bungalow at 317 5th St. has a large basement, quite unusual for a beach house, while 311 5th St., built in 1931, is Zigzag Moderne.

18. 218-220 5th St. are circa 1908 examples of Neo-Classical Commercial architecture. This building once housed the City Hall, Fire Department and City Jail. The facade was redone in the 1930s but later on in the tour the original brick exterior can be seen. 210 5th St., now Luggati's restaurant, was built circa 1920 and was both the city's garage and part of an auto dealership. In the 1930s and '40s it was a bowling alley.

19. The Shank House, a two-story Craftsman Bungalow, was built in 1913 for Dr. George Shank, one of the first doctors in HB. This bungalow was moved from its original location on 20th St. to here around 1926. The HB Redevelopment Agency obtained the property in 2004 for use as a police substation.



20. Built in 1916, these brick and mortar jail cells are now used as freezer storage for nearby restaurants. Notice the original brick exterior of the redone 1908 commercial architecture seen earlier in the tour.



21. This Deco/Moderne building at 411 Olive was built during the oil boom years in 1935 and was once the office of Dr. Hawes, a general practitioner who treated burns from oil fires. In the 1980s the HB International Surfing Museum was established here. Among the exhibits is one on the preservation of the old Surf Theater on HB's 5th St, demolished in 1970s. The exhibit has vintage theater seats and screenings of classic surfing movies like "Endless Summer."

22. The United States Post Office, built in 1935 and restored in 1991, was the work of Architect Louis A. Simon. He also designed the Federal Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles. Inside are many original features and historic pictures.

23. At 217 Main St. is the Talbert-Leatherman Building, circa 1904. Originally Pioneer Feed & Fuel Co, it is one of the oldest commercial buildings in town. HB's first gas pump was here. This Western False Front building had many businesses based here including a Japanese market. It is currently Longboards Restaurant and was restored in 1990. At 213 Main St is The Sugar Shack, built in 1918, and established as a restaurant in 1967. This building has been host to businesses including the Huntington Beach Sheet Metal Works (1919) and Huntington Beach Electric (1924).

24. At the corner of Main and Walnut the site in 1928 was Standard Market. Note the plaque at HSS Clothing Store. Around the corner at the restaurant's entrance find an informative plaque about the market's history.



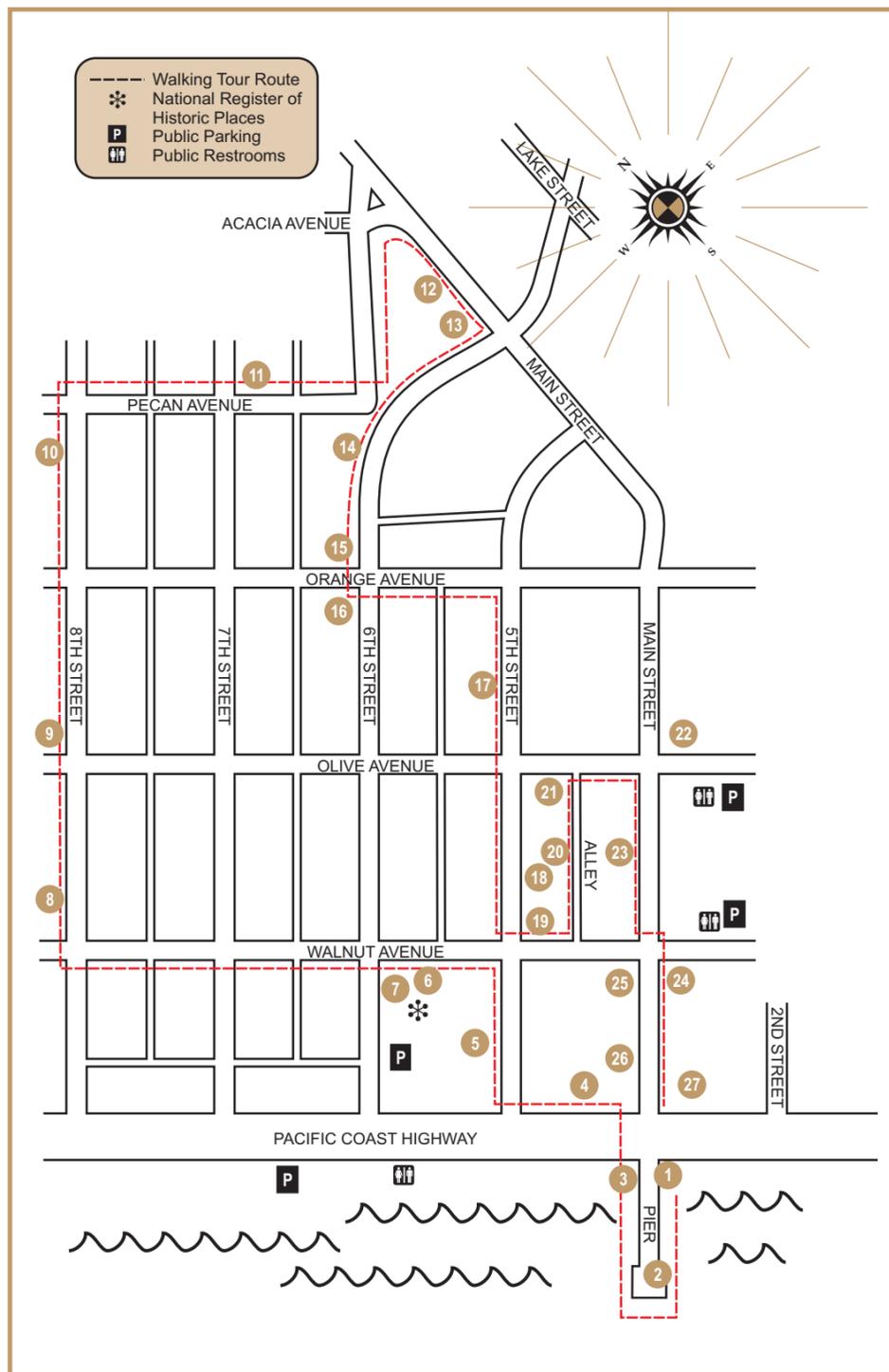
25. Across the street at 127 Main the Streamline Moderne building, circa 1935, now Beach Island, was originally the HB Cut Rate Drugs. It was built during the city's second oil boom.



26. At 117 Main St. is Perq's Tavern, originally the Pacific City School (1905). Around 1914 it was rebuilt as the real estate offices of Seely & Lavinger. After the discovery of oil in HB in 1920 and the arrival of thousands of oil "roughnecks," H.F. Linder bought the building in 1922, turning it into Palace Pool Hall on the first floor and the Palace Hotel on the second. It remained a pool hall under different names until 1952 when Brennemont Photography Studios moved in. In the 1960s the Hall family ran a photography studio on the ground floor and lived upstairs.



27. Pierside Pavilion is where the legendary Golden Bear once stood. Opened in 1929, it was demolished in 1986 to make way for downtown redevelopment. It was an entertainment venue featuring stars such as Linda Ronstadt, Arlo Guthrie, Robin Williams, The Doors, Steve Martin and Jerry Garcia, among many others.



We Hope You Enjoyed This Small Glimpse Of Our Historic Downtown