

SOUTH BAY
History Tidbits

HERMOSA BEACH HISTORY

Hermosa Beach was part of the original Spanish land grant for "Rancho Sausal Redondo" ("Ranch of the Round Clump of Willows") in 1822, a rancho with a land mass of nearly 25,000 acres which extended from the areas as far north of what is now Playa del Rey, as far east as Inglewood, and as far south as Hermosa Beach.

In the early days, Hermosa Beach, like so many of its neighboring cities - Torrance, Lawndale, Inglewood - was one vast sweep of rolling hills covered with fields of grain, mostly barley. The immediate beach area of Hermosa was a collection of sparse-looking sand dunes seemingly 40 miles from nowhere. A steady wind whipping across the barren dunes made life miserable for the first hardy pioneers.

On Christmas Eve, 1906, Hermosa Beach held its first incorporation election and chose its first city officers. In the interest of accuracy its only fair to report that the idea of incorporating the city didn't get a resounding vote of confidence from an eager mob of voters. The final tally was 24 votes for, and 23 against. But resounding or not, Hermosa Beach was duly incorporated and received its charter from the state as a sixth class city on January 14, 1907.

The Santa Fe railway was the only transportation system through Hermosa Beach. It was seven blocks from the beach. The street that led to the tracks was called Santa Fe Avenue, but was later renamed Pier Avenue. There was no railway station for Hermosa, but later the Railroad Company donated an old boxcar to be used as a storage place for freight. In 1926, the Santa Fe Company built a modern stucco depot and installed Western Union telegraph service in it.



1927 Hermosa Beach Biltmore Hotel

One of the most ambitious projects attempted in the city came in the mid-1920's with the opening of the building, which later became the Hermosa Biltmore Hotel. The Hotel was located between 14th and 15th Streets on the Strand. In those days it was the headquarters for the Surf and Sand Club, and was run on a private club basis. A number of wealthy persons backed the project and for several years the building, a notable achievement in those days, was the showplace and social center of Hermosa. The private club idea proved to be a losing proposition, however, and a few years later the founders and owners sold out to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. This group, with better financing, attempted to run the property on more or less the same basis but finally sold out to hotel interests about 1930. During World War II, for a short time the building was taken over by the federal government and used as a youth training center. This property was torn down in the late 1960's for development, and is now the site of a public park.

The above is an excerpt from my book "Historic Tales of Palos Verdes and the South Bay," which can be purchased at www.southbayhistory.com.

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