

A HISTORY OF THE HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA

FOREWORD

To have lived the development of the Hollywood Riviera from its inception to today has been an experience. I am forever thankful to have been part of the family that caused the Hollywood Riviera to actually be, and to have been able to see and hear about the plans and vision for this area. If this writing serves one purpose, and that is to make the residents that live here proud and pleased with what we have and to strive to retain the charm and ambiance, the purpose is served.

THE EARLY HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA

The first inhabitants of the land that became the Hollywood Riviera were the native Indian tribes composed of small bands. These were probably of the Shoshone and/or Chumash tribes that travelled nomadically. They had to follow the food sources. Wild grains, acorns, roots, native greenery, birds, fish, and, of course, water, weather and the seasons dictated their movements. During drought times water and food of the land would become scarce. Past experience would cause the Indians to travel to such areas as the seashore with available fish and shell-life for survival. The Hollywood Riviera had a unique advantage with two year-round springs that flowed out of the bluffs at the beach. The Indians lived on the sand dunes at the top of the cliffs. Fish, crabs, clams, abalone, birds, squirrels, gophers, native edible seeds plants and roots assured them of a ready food source.

Several "digs" were done by the Southwest Museum, Highland Park, California, to study the sites. They found three levels of occupation. Shell middens, arrowheads, grinding bowls and tools were found. An exhibit is on display at the museum.

The early travelers to the area did not understand the Indians' way of life. They felt these Indians were inferior to the eastern tribes and called them "digger" Indians. These tribes actually had a highly moral and peaceful way of life. Some of the finest woven baskets were created by these native inhabitants.

WILDLIFE

The wildlife consisted of a natural food chain. The wild seeds and roots provided food for the squirrels, gophers and birds. They in turn fed the coyotes and hawks. Dove, quail, owls, shrikes, meadowlarks and linnets were residents of the area. Gopher, king and red racer snakes lived off the available mice, gophers, young birds and eggs. Urbanization has reduced or eliminated many of these creatures. We still have skunks, possum, and a few raccoons. The mockingbirds and linnets are still here also. Of the current birdlife, the crows, lesser jays, English sparrows and starlings are not native to the region.

THE "CASTLES"

Before the development of the Hollywood Riviera the area was dry-farmed. The farmhouse was situated on the land just east of the Hollywood Riviera Club site. The other residents of that time were squatters that lived at the base of the bluff. They too had found the springs. The lumber and cargo piers at Redondo spilled or threw away unwanted lumber, which would drift south to Malaga Cove. The "castles" were built on pilings and out of the available flotsam. Years ago, evidence could be seen where the residents had cut into the diatomaceous cliff for their fireplaces, as well as remains of the pilings that the two structures were built on. There was also a soft drink stand, north of there, where the Lifeguard building now stands. Dwellers lived there for health and economic reasons, and sometimes to evade the law. Like the Indians, they lived off the available food on the land and in the ocean.

The development of the Hollywood Riviera caused the Corporation to discourage these residents by evicting them and burning these structures.

THE CLIFFORD REID CORPORATION

The Clifford Reid Corporation developed the Hollywood Riviera. The land was owned by the Huntington Land Company, part of the land given to railroad companies or creating rail transportation to an area. The mile square property was similar to the French Riviera which Clifford Reid had visited on a European vacation. Reid was selling land in Los Angeles and in the San Fernando Valley. He was born in McMinville, Oregon. He had a natural flair for selling, and after completing high school and some college, started selling "views", the early name for hand-held stereopticon 3D pictures. It wasn't long before he had several salesmen doing the selling for him. Real estate sales was a natural progression for Clifford. About this time he married and moved

to Portland, a larger growth area. While there, he once won a house on a bowling bet.

The exciting growth all over Southern California and especially in the Los Angeles basin was too tempting. South they came.

The Reids first bought a house on Crenshaw Boulevard, near Wilshire Boulevard, about a mile from the real estate office, which was in a building on Western Avenue. Reid and the sales staff were selling lots in and around the City, as well as in the current land boom in the San Fernando Valley. In fact, Reid named the area where they were selling lots "North Hollywood".

Clifford Reid was entranced by the motion picture industry, and upon finding the open land south of Redondo, felt it would be a natural location for the Hollywood Set to buy and build. Original plans were for a major thoroughfare connecting the tract and Los Angeles, to be called the Hollywood Palos Verdes Parkway. Part of this is in existence today as far as Torrance Boulevard.

Reid copied the sales methods successful in developing other tracts in Southern California. Potential land buyers were taken by wagon, auto, and street car to the outlying sites, fed a lunch, and given a promotional speech to convince them to buy. Many of the cities east of Los Angeles were started in this way. The salesmen, working for Reid, would go to the hotels and seek out tourists, invite them down to the Hollywood Riviera development, drive them down to a free lunch and speech as well as a promotional film.

As did Palos Verdes, the Hollywood Riviera was developed as a racially restricted area. Only caucasians were sold lots. This was in effect until after World War II. Building restrictions were controlled by an art jury that approved the design and assured that all houses had tile roofs. The racial restrictions and tile roof requirements were waived after the War.

The initial developed area had curbs, paved streets, planted parkways and underground utilities, telephone, and electrical service.

A tract office was built at the corner of Monte D'Oro and Palos Verdes Boulevard. It was a very attractive building with sales offices. A large mess hall with lecture hall was built behind the office for sales presentations.

The first house started was Clifford and Ella Reid's, large and impressive, on Monte D'Oro. Fred Marlowe, vice president of the corporation, built the second home on Camino de las Colinas. The Bartmus, Stewart, Smith, Close, Argenbright, Goodnight, Geary, Kendall, Ellinwood, and approximately three other families

comprised the early houses.

Several salesmen, working for the Clifford F Reid Corporation, learned selling for the corporation and became developers on their own. Fred Marlow with Fritz Burns developed Westchester, and later developed South Shores near San Pedro. Newt Bass was in the oil business in Torrance in partnership with Goodnight. Both men started selling real estate in the Hollywood Riviera. Newt Bass later on developed Apple Valley.

It took much sweat and hard work to create roads, curbs, underground utilities and storm drains in those days. Mules, plows and fresno graders, both mule and man operated, cut, filled and dug to make the tract. Four mules were hitched to the fresno grader, pulling it to fill it, then dragging it to the fill site. The man would then have to lift the long handle to pitch the fresno so that it would dump the load. The initial mule camp was situated between Paseo de Gracia and what is now Pacific Coast Highway just west of El Retiro Park. It was moved later to west of Palos Verdes Boulevard next to the Palos Verdes property line. A large apartment is now situated on that site. A team of mules were kept there until WWII to cut the weeds on the vacant lots, and haul water for the trees, flowers, and shrubs planted in the parkways.

THE HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA BEACH CLUB

The Club was built and opened in 1930. It was dedicated to the residents and property owners of the tract. The Club was an outstanding structure with plenty of space for large parties. Roy C. Stewart managed the Club, from shortly after it's opening til 1942, and kept the facility open through the depression thirties. Banquets, dances, wedding receptions and casual drop-ins enjoyed the amenities. Several South Bay organizations met at the Club. The Sandpipers, a local women's group, the Redondo Rotary, 20-30 Club, sororities, fraternities and high school proms met or held parties there. One of the largest and wildest day and night parties was held by North American Aircraft for all employees and families in 1940. Several thousand people took over the Club. Free beer and food led to a wild and crazy party. Cleaning up the mess the next day was awesome.

HOLLYWOOD COMES TO THE HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA

One segment of a motion picture was shot using the open veranda on the ocean side of the Club. Two small airplanes were used, landing crosswind on the beach, a challenge in itself. The lead actor supposedly arrives by airplane after doing several stunts over the ocean. Memory recalls Jack Holt as one of the supporting actors.

The female lead I believe was Anne Harding. The male lead was of the caliber of Robert Young.

Another segment of a Pete Smith short film was shot in the club swimming pool. A steel cylinder large enough for the camera and cameraman was placed upright in the pool. A fake cave was positioned at the deepest part of the pool which the actors would swim through and into. Rocks, seaweed, small sharks and a dead swordfish with which the actors struggled were part of the action.

On Christmas Day 1941 at the start of WWII the first sighting of a Japanese submarine was from the veranda of the Club. Soldiers unfamiliar with the ocean were placed along the cliffs and at the Club. One of the soldiers, looking through a telescope, spotted an unusual vessel near one of the fishing barges. He asked Roy Stewart to identify what kind of vessel it was, and he recognized it as a submarine. The sighting was reported, causing a small military plane to arrive over the surfaced sub and drop a bomb. The bomb landed next to the sub on the same side as a fishing barge. The submarine moved westward on the surface and as dusk and low clouds increased, a Navy ship could be dimly be seen firing at the Japanese submarine. The bomb also ruptured the wood planking of the fishing barge which took on water until she was decks awash.

The Beach Club suffered damage during the war due to four army field guns placed south of the Club along the tops of the bluffs. Their firing at airplane-towed targets to train the new troops created heavy concussion damage to the clubhouse.

The Club was in limbo from 1942 until the end of the War. A Navy commander living in the Hollywood Riviera after retiring from the service, put heart, money and soul into restoring the Club. He operated it for a time when all the returning GI's were more interested in marriage, college and buying a home.

The Commander eventually sold out to others. The Club was operated into the fifties as a nightclub. The quality slowly declined until the fire that destroyed the structure in 1955.

HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA CHILDREN

Two families made up the bulk of the children in the Hollywood Riviera. The Bartmus family moved into their new house on Camino de las Colinas with four, which eventually increased to nine. The Stewarts, on August 6, 1929, moved into their house on Via Linda Vista with three sons and one more born in 1930.

An immediate problem occurred. There was no nearby school in the Torrance system. The early children were initially sent to South School in Redondo Beach for their first year. After that they attended Malaga

Cove Grammar School, then attended Redondo Union High School. It wasn't until after WWII that the construction of housing warranted the building of Newton, Parkway, and Riviera Grammar Schools.

THE HOLLYWOOD RIVIERA FIRE DEPARTMENT

In the thirties, with the many open fields of grass and weeds, occasional grass fires would occur. The Torrance Fire Department converted a City truck to a fire truck with a large water tank. A fire house was built behind the tract office on Monte d'Oro. Roy Stewart became the chief of all the volunteer stations. When the siren atop the pole was sounded any able bodied man in the area was supposed to go and help fight the fire. The truck was so successful that Torrance took that truck back and provided the volunteers with an old high wheel La France engine that was afraid of the hills but still did the job. The only house fire started when curtains blew close to a fire in the fireplace at Mrs. Tuttle's on Calle Mayor, burning about half the house. During the war a fire bug was setting grass fires on the upper undeveloped area early in the morning. It kept the volunteers busy, and losing some sleep.

THE PARKS

Hollywood Riviera was plotted to have two larger parks and some smaller neighborhood parks. El Retiro Park was initially the nursery for starting plants and shrubs for the parks and parkways. This park eventually became a fine park. The triangle in the center of the Village was once a very attractive park with lawns, benches, trees, shrubs, and a lily pond in the center. It even had a flagpole on which the American flag was raised every Fourth of July. The park, as in the Joni Mitchell song about paradise, was paved over to become a parking lot. It would have been a nice setting for the Village, but the automobile rules.

THE BIG RED STREETCARS

The Pacific Electric streetcars that came south on Catalina Street to the end of the line at Avenue I were a vital link for the residents of the Hollywood Riviera and Palos Verdes Estates to the South Bay Cities and to Los Angeles, either by the Del Rey Line along the beach or the Gardena-Watts Line. It was a daily commute for those that worked in the city. Before school and at Christmas it was an annual trip to buy clothes and to visit the toy departments at the big stores, as well as the animated store windows. The Red Line would have been a wonderful system today if it were still in existence. In about 1948 the right of way from Avenue I to Vista Del Mar was for sale for \$3,500.

TALE OF TWO CITIES

Before the Hollywood Riviera was started, the cities of Torrance and Redondo were annexing land adjacent to their borders. Redondo annexed the northwest corner of the tract south to what became the Club site. Torrance decided they wanted beach frontage so they annexed the remainder of the Hollywood Riviera. Redondo had moved south when Clifton was made a tract, and lots sold from the beach to Elena (Pacific Coast Highway) and Avenue A to I. The east-west boundary line passed through the front doors of the Clubhouse, then west to Monte d'Oro almost to Camino de las Colinas, then north to Avenue I. Consternation occurred later on as lots were built on with part of the lot in Redondo and part in Torrance.

THE CIRCUS

An exciting event took place in the mid-thirties when the Barnum and Bailey Circus came to the Hollywood Riviera. The rail cars arrived on the Santa Fe trackage in Redondo, just north of lower Diamond Street. The circus wagons were off-loaded and towed by horses along Pacific and Catalina to where they set up on the open ground between Hollywood Palos Verdes Parkway and the Hollywood Riviera Beach Club. The full three ring circus, side shows and wild animals were an exciting event for everyone, especially the children.

GOLF DRIVING RANGE

Later, on that same site, a golf driving range was in existence. A former golf pro at the Palos Verdes Country Club ran the range for several years. A putt-putt golf course existed just east of the Beach Club in the early thirties where the Vista Bahia apartments now stand. The Depression caused it's demise after a few years.

THE GLIDER FIELD

During the thirties, the upper Hollywood Riviera with it's gradual slope towards the west and into the normal westerly wind became a glider field on most weekends. The first gliders were called primary gliders, and had an open framework fuselage, an open bucket seat, and a skid on which to land. They were pulled into the air by two long ropes and manpower. Needless to say, they made only short flights. It wasn't long before more sophisticated gliders were flying. An automobile and a long tow line were able to tow the gliders high enough so they could reach the updraft from the cliffs at the beach and stay aloft as long as they wished. Two glider

meets were held with planes brought from some distances to compete. One pilot lost his life when the wing broke shortly after takeoff. The Buxton family used to fly a two place orange colored glider called the Transporter. During the strong March winds they would launch, and climb to high altitudes on the updraft created by the westerly side of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. After reaching the desired altitude they would glide to Mines Field, now LAX, and land there to be picked up by the chase car and trailer. Their home was in Inglewood. Quite a nice idea.

EASTER SUNRISE

An Easter sunrise service was held one year at the top of the upper Hollywood Riviera slope at the location of Via Alameda on Easter morning, 1930. A large cross was erected and a stand for the choral singing group was placed there. The event was never repeated due to the effect the Depression had on property sales.

THE DEPRESSION

The 1929 Depression caused lot sales to drop, the number of salespeople to be reduced and left the Hollywood Riviera in limbo through the early and middle thirties.

People were struggling to hold on to what they had and not buying lots or building more houses, although several houses were built during that period. Men out of work became part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of the "alphabet" government agencies created to employ those out of jobs. A large group was put to work exterminating the thousands of ground squirrels, called "grey-diggers", that populated the fields. The men used burning sulphur down the holes in the ground to kill the creatures. The ground owls that also lived in burroughs also died, but gophers, with their closed underground homes, survived. The demise of the grey-diggers killed off a source of food for the hawks, coyotes and buzzards, leaving a big hole in the food chain.

The WPA crews were next put to work grading and widening Palos Verdes Parkway from a two-lane road from the Palos Verdes Line to Catalina Street. Wheel-barrow, shovels, mule-drawn wagons, and a lot of men graded, widened and established the existing road.

Many of the men had lost well-paying jobs — office workers, factory workers, bankers and others — and were totally unaccustomed to pick and shovel work out of doors. Many found muscles they didn't know they

had, and blisters. The standing joke was they needed rubber-handled shovels so that they couldn't lean and rest so much. It was survival time, and the work kept them busy until the late thirties, when the jobs in the airframe industry and related occupations became available.

WORLD WAR II YEARS

Many undeveloped lots were sold for taxes and by people unable to build due to economics before the war and the lack of materials. Lots could be had for as little as \$500.00. This all changed at the end of the war. The GIs were returning, picking up their interrupted lives, marrying and starting families. In addition to some individual homes built in the lower Hollywood Riviera, a large development was built on the southeast upper part of the tract. Rudy Mayer, brother to Louis B. Mayer, and a man named Kenner, and one other, built and sold that group of homes. The next tract was the homes west of that tract on the westerly slope from Via Alameda to Palos Verdes Boulevard. In addition to the many apartments, the final fairly large development was west of Palos Verdes Boulevard as well as Parkway School, the only actual public school in the Hollywood Riviera.

The Hollywood Riviera had arrived. The early vision of Clifford F. Reid and his company was finally realized. The commercial village and continued building on lots in the lower Hollywood Riviera has covered the entire tract. A fine, attractive and proud community now exists.