

CALIFORNIA
WaterfrontAge
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The Lost Piers of Santa Monica Bay

CALIFORNIA WaterfrontAge

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STATE COASTAL CONSERVANCY

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The cover photograph of Ocean Park in 1920 is from the Fred Basten Collection.

JOE'S CORNER

Joseph E. Petrillo

I BELIEVE there are two primary elements that reappear in the urban waterfronts we consider exciting and attractive. The first element is a cluster of activities that require a waterfront location—recreational uses such as bathing or boating; commercial uses such as fishing, cruise-ship berthing, boat haul-out facilities, and port operations; and environmental uses such as the wildlife sanctuary described in the previous issue of *WaterfrontAge*. The second element is public access: whether achieved by paths, boardwalks, or promenades, public access adds to the vitality and color of the area, and certainly improves the overall value of the waterfront location, both for the public served and for the commercial ventures nearby.

The variety of uses on the waterfront—sometimes in startling juxtaposition—attracts a variety of visitors, and public access increases the force of that attraction. However, it seems that these two requirements, access and water-related uses, must exist together to guarantee a lively waterfront.

In addition to these primary elements the waterfront should provide activities for their support such as boat repair facilities, chandleries, bait shops, restaurants, and even hotels. Beyond this the normal city uses and densities are appropriate.

In my travels I have found this pattern of waterfront development remarkably consistent in both recreational and working waterfronts. In particular, in Scotland I happened upon a small fishing village on the east coast called Arboath. Its harbor, encircled by walkways and old stone breakwaters, teems with activity; recreational and fishing boats jostle one an-

other; people strolling stop to watch the fishing boats unloading and processing their catch or to watch the fish being smoked. Restaurants, inns, and shops line the streets nearby and overlook the harbor, and the houses of residents peek out over the scene.

Adjacent to all this activity, a small rocky beach is crowded with bathers. But surprisingly, a few hundred yards away and still visible from the harbor, there is a wide sandy beach, backed by a hand-

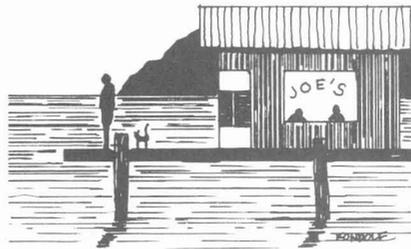
some promenade and an empty grassy slope. The beach and its park are often deserted, in marked contrast to the busy harbor area. The contrast suggests a connection between the harbor's development and its appeal; unlike the solitary

beach, the harbor provides facilities, for a variety of activities as well as simple access.

Arboath and other well known waterfront cities arrived at this pattern of development by trial and error. The pressures of competing uses on the waterfront led to the development of a variety of different industries side-by-side. In addition, certain industries, such as fishing, boating, and lodging, enforced the need for public access to the waterfront.

Recently, the State Coastal Conservancy has embarked on a number of projects that seek to help establish this pattern in some of California's urban waterfronts. In Morro Bay, a small town in San Luis Obispo County, our application of these elements is nearing completion.

The Conservancy has had a tremendous influence on Morro Bay's waterfront. The area is particularly suitable for the Conservancy's projects because it has



remained largely undeveloped, and our projects can influence the shape of future development. We decided that it was inappropriate and unnecessary to attempt to redevelop the area so we decided instead to anticipate future growth and provide the structural elements around which the waterfront could develop as the city of Morro Bay grows. This meant that our projects aimed to manipulate the existing development pressures into patterns which would guarantee the long-term health of the waterfront as well as provide public amenities.

The Embarcadero had become crowded with commercial uses which had come to exclude other uses. Our first project was to open the area to public use by planning two public parks at either end of the Embarcadero. From the Embarcadero, the view of Morro Bay's striking harbor had been gradually cut off by restaurants built over the water on pilings. Ironically, the commercial value of the view had led to the development that threatened that very view, one of the major tourist attractions of the area. One Conservancy project extends viewing platforms from the streets that end at the harbor's edge; these platforms also provide physical access to the harbor by including ramps leading down to floating docks. The docks are to be used by visiting boaters, who would be able to dock there and visit the city's restaurants and shops. This improved access has created considerable interest among private developers, who see a likely market in visiting boaters.

The local commercial fishing industry, containing the largest active fleet in the southern California, was enhanced by a Conservancy grant for a new commercial fishing pier for tying up fishing boats and unloading the catch. By ordinance, the commercial fishing fleet on the northern end of the Embarcadero is protected from the pressures of lucrative visitor-serving development. However, the city administrator at Morro Bay, Gary Napper, considers the fishing fleet's activities a major tourist attraction. Visitors come to the pier especially to watch the fish scooped from the boats then

dropped in a cascade into the carts on the docks on their way to the nearby processing plant. The push to diversify the uses of the waterfront has included recent plans to make a major fish-processing plant stretching from downtown to the Embarcadero itself, which should improve the quality of that product and provide an interesting fixture for tourists to visit.

Most recently, the initial steps have been taken to provide some public financing for the construction of two hotels to support the rehabilitation of Morro Bay's waterfront. In contrast to this large-scale commercial development, part of the Conservancy's program at Morro Bay has been the restoration and preservation of the extensive dune areas north of the town center.

Mayor Bud Zeuchner considers the economics of the waterfront's development secondary to the need to preserve the aesthetic value of the setting, which is considerable. He believes that the Conservancy's projects have successfully combined the conflicting pressures (to develop commerce, to preserve natural beauty, to encourage tourism) into a compatible system. The final product, he anticipates, will be a waterfront where water and land both meet the people and meet the people's needs. The comprehensive plan which embraces Morro Bay's waterfront does not allow any one use to intrude on any other, yet still encourages a great variety of water-dependent uses of the waterfront.

Every effort has been made to pattern Morro Bay's waterfront after the liveliest urban waterfronts, like that at Arboath. The Conservancy's projects have sought to combine commercial, recreational, and environmental elements of water-dependent activity, to juxtapose these uses for more efficiency and interest, and to provide sufficient access to the waterfront to encourage visitors.

Although it remains to be seen if Morro Bay's waterfront, which is bound to grow, develops into the lively and productive setting we find in the world's most successful waterfronts, I think a good start has been made. □

EBB AND FLOW



"He seems very California, but actually he's bi-coastal."

Drawing by Lorenz. ©1980
The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

Contributions to Ebb and Flow Welcome From Both Coasts

As *WaterfrontAge* expands its coverage of waterfront developments, brief news items, notices, and announcements of conferences and reports are more important than ever. We encourage our readers to submit any such material. The deadline is one month before each new season, and pieces should be topical during each quarter. The reward: a byline and our thanks.

Waterfront Conferences Set

"Coastal Zone '85," the fourth symposium on coastal and ocean management, will be held from July 30 to August 2 at the Omni International Hotel in Baltimore. This year's theme of "new

directions" will be explored in over fifty technical sessions, which cover every conceivable topic from dune restoration and port planning to "State of the Art in Models and Providing Real-Time Information." Day-long courses in dispute resolution, coastal engineering, liability, and management will be offered on July 29. Entertainment includes a crab feast, a lighthouse show, and field trips in Chesapeake Bay. Registration costs \$235; information may be obtained from Coastal Zone '85, P.O. Box 26062, San Francisco, CA 94126.

On September 27 and 28, the Waterfront Center will hold its third annual conference, "Urban Waterfronts '85: Water Makes a Difference." The conference takes place at the Ramada Renaissance in Washington, DC. Registration by September 2 costs \$120 for subscribers to *Waterfront World* and \$160 for nonsubscribers. The Waterfront Center is a nonprofit organization providing

technical assistance and research, and publishes a very informative bimonthly newsletter on waterfront issues. Contact the Waterfront Center at 1536 44th Street N.W., Washington, DC 20007; (202) 337-0356.

State Flagship Visits the Bay Area

The *Californian*, first and only flagship of the state of California, sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco Bay on April 26, 1985 for a month-long stay in the bay area. An authentic replica of the nineteenth-century Coast Guard Revenue Cutter *C. W. Lawrence*, the ship was built by the Nautical Heritage Society, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Dana Point, Orange County.

The Nautical Heritage Society was formed five years ago to care for an extensive collection of paintings, model ships, and nautical artifacts. Guided by museum director Steve Christman, the Society has expanded its activities to involve young people in the art of sailing and the craft of shipbuilding. The Society has an active sail training program, supported by a membership of 1100 persons, that is available to all interested young people, regardless of income. Current activities include the construction of a smaller sailing ship in the Sacramento area and the search for a permanent site to develop a "working historical shipyard" where ships like the *Californian* could be built and maintained.

In its brief history, the *Californian* has been active and highly visible as the state's flagship. Shortly after christening by Gloria Deukmejian, the *Californian* led the parade of "tall ships" at the opening of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. The ship has also been used for numerous sail training cruises and for public ceremonies at the ports of Long Beach and San Diego. While in the San Francisco Bay area, the *Californian*

led the Decorated Boat Parade marking the opening of yacht season and conducted training cruises to the Farallon Islands and Drakes Bay. After visiting harbors in Sausalito and Redwood City, the ship returned to home port in Dana Point Harbor on May 28.

On June 9 the ship embarked for Hawaii to compete in the Ancient Mariners Boat Race on Maui. On the invitation of Governor Ariyoshi, the *Californian* led the tall ships parade on July 4 in Honolulu Harbor as part of the year-long bicentennial celebration of the Japanese immigration to the Hawaiian Islands. The ship will return to the San Francisco area for the month of August and will be open to the public in Sacramento on August 10-11 and in San Francisco on August 24-25. For more information about the *Californian* or the Nautical Heritage Society, contact Steve Christman, Nautical Heritage Museum, 24532 Del Prado, Dana Point 92629.

—Tom Mikkelsen

Imperial Beach Sandcastle Contest

The largest sandcastle building contest in the nation takes place on July 28, 1985 in Imperial Beach, California, the most southwesterly city in the continental United States. For the fifth year in a row, teams will compete for over \$14,000 in such categories as "Castles of Your Mind," "Creatures of the Sea," and the new "Grand Champion Master's Class," made up of teams that have placed first in their category at least twice in past competitions.

This year the town expects over 70,000 spectators from all over the country to watch forty to sixty teams compete. Teams are limited to ten adults (plus as many kids as can be rounded up), and they have four hours in which to work. Their creations go far beyond mere castles. Last year's winners included the "Birth of Venus," consist-



ing of a sculpture of Venus rising from an enormous conch shell, poised on the back of a turtle in between two giant seahorses; and the "Eruption of Pompeii," created by a team whose members came from as far away as Hawaii.

A whole weekend of events including a Sandcastle Ball, a pancake breakfast, a parade, jet ski races, and evening fireworks will lead up to the sandcastle competition, held from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. on Sunday. For entry forms or further information, contact Mary Nichols at 1250 Fifth St., Imperial Beach, CA 92032; (619) 429-4757.

—Alyse Jacobson



Access Construction Begins at Sea Ranch

Without complaint, controversy, or confrontation, construction has begun on the first of five public accessways at the Sea Ranch in northern Sonoma County. The heavy equipment and workers of the Martin Knapp Construction Company went about their business virtually unnoticed in the calm of an early spring morning, a calm that belied nearly twelve years of bitter debate and exhaustive legal challenges to the policies and regulatory authority of the California Coastal Commission.

The controversy began in 1973 when the newly formed Coastal Commission adopted guidelines for new development at Sea Ranch. These guidelines prohibited future development on individual lots until the subdivision as a whole met certain "overall" conditions designed to protect public access, scenic resources, and water quality. Several years earlier, Oceanic Properties, the developer of Sea Ranch, had obtained local approval for a planned-unit development of 5300 new residences. At the time of approval and consistent with current state law, Oceanic had donated land for a new county park and an access trail at the northern end of the ranch overlooking the Gualala River. But the

commission found these donations inadequate, and over the next four years Oceanic filed unsuccessful lawsuits claiming that it had a vested right to proceed with its planned development free of the commission's overall conditions. The Sea Ranch Association, a group of individual property owners at Sea Ranch, also filed lawsuits, which were vigorously opposed by the state and by various citizens groups. Ultimately the lawsuits proved fruitless, but the hardship experienced by individual property owners made itself known in Sacramento. In August 1980 the state legislature passed Assembly Bill 2706 (the Bane Bill), a bill designed to settle the development issues at Sea Ranch and provide 500,000 dollars to the State Coastal Conservancy to acquire easements there for public accessways. In July 1981, after the Superior Court dismissed a final lawsuit disputing the Bane Bill, the Conservancy completed acquisition of the easements, and slightly less than a year later the Conservancy conveyed the easements to Sonoma County along with a grant of 255,800 dollars for the construction of accessways.

Construction of the first accessway, to Black Point Beach near the southern end of the ranch, began on April 8, 1985. In May work began on the accessways to Pebble Beach and Shell Beach, located north of Black Point. The individual accessways will consist of a small parking lot (four to ten cars), restrooms, and directional signing at the trailhead off of Highway One; a trail from the parking area through the open meadow areas leading to a blufftop overlooking the beach; and a stairway to the beach. A formal opening ceremony at the Sea Ranch is scheduled for late this summer. The remaining two accessways and a three-mile-long blufftop trail in the northern portion of the ranch should be open by this fall.

—Tom Mikkelsen

The Urban Edge

The State Coastal Conservancy has announced the publication of a new book on coastal design issues, edited by the Conservancy's Executive Officer Joseph E. Petrillo and Peter Grenell, and titled *The Urban Edge: Where the City Meets The Sea*.

It is well known that California is the most populous state in the United States. But few people realize that eighty-five percent of the state's population lives within thirty miles of the Pacific coast. In California's coastal urban areas—as in much of the rest of the world—the competition for waterfront space and the need for public access to the shore compound the problems of past haphazard development and ongoing shore deterioration. *The Urban Edge: Where the City Meets the Sea* addresses itself to these issues and, more importantly, to the potential for improvement in these diverse environments where land, sea, and humanity have met and continue to interact.

Richly illustrated, the book brings together the profound insights of some of the country's foremost architects, landscape designers, planners, economists, and historians. It offers both a celebration of land-and-seascapes and an objective study of the not-always-gentle human hands upon them. It draws upon the work and long experience of the State Coastal Conservancy, a unique state agency whose efforts to define guiding principles for development have received national attention. The authors have distilled from many sources a statement for intelligent planning and future "architecting" on California's or any region's urban edges and other precious seaside places.

Broad historical surveys by such noted architects as Charles W. Moore and David Gebhard place the California experience in the larger context of human coastal settlement and architectural history. Well-known authors such as Jim Burns, Gray Brechin, Sally Woodbridge,

and others track the fascinating architectural history of the California coastline—from Mission to Mission Revival, Sea Ranch, and Bungalow—to the most recent developments along the coast. In sum, *The Urban Edge* attempts to create an “envelope” of guidelines to encourage development that is aesthetically, economically, environmentally, and socially responsible.

The Urban Edge is designed to help educate the public about basic coastal design issues that demand an informed and concerned citizenry. Successful models of publicly initiated development and direct community involvement are presented, offering possible approaches and solutions to the challenges of coastal design and development.

The Urban Edge, edited by Joseph E. Petrillo and Peter Grenell, is available from the co-publisher, William Kaufman, Inc., 95 First Street, Los Altos, CA 94022, (415) 948-5810, and is priced at \$14.95.

Conservancy's Recent Waterfront Projects

On March 21, 1985, the State Coastal Conservancy authorized a grant of up to \$357,000 to the city of Pacifica for the construction of a seven-block pedestrian promenade, street improvements, and recreational support structures along Beach Boulevard in the Sharp Park neighborhood of Pacifica. The fishing pier, beach, and golf course in the Sharp Park area attract over 120,000 visitors annually from the San Francisco Bay area. In response to extensive storm damage in 1982, the city of Pacifica is undertaking an ambitious public improvements plan for the Beach Boulevard waterfront. When completed, the project may result in an investment of over \$5 million of public funds. The plan calls for a seawall between Paloma Avenue and Clarendon Road, repaving of Beach Boulevard, a pedestrian promenade, a park, three new stairways, and other recreational support facilities.



The project's first phase, a seven-block seawall and stairway, was scheduled for completion in April 1985. The new \$357,000 grant from the Conservancy will enable the city to build the pedestrian promenade and install benches and other seating structures, traffic bollards, lighting, and special paving along the seven blocks.

In 1983 severe winter storms destroyed the end of the Huntington Beach Municipal Pier. In March 1984 the Conservancy authorized a \$150,000 reimbursable grant to contribute to the pier restoration. At its March 21, 1985 meeting, the Conservancy granted the city's request for additional assistance, up to \$275,000, to complete the restoration. These reimbursable funds will replace the restaurant at the end of the pier with a facility that will have a second-story public observation deck, and will provide for additional utilities for the pier and restaurant.

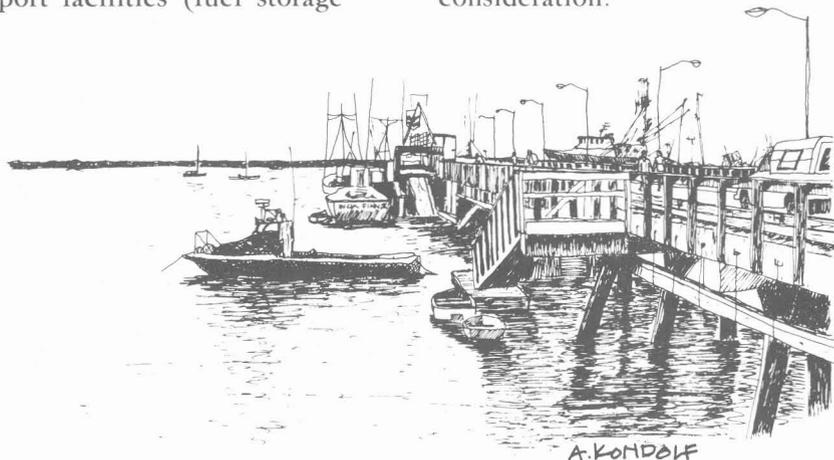
The same 1983 winter storms that damaged the Huntington Beach Municipal Pier also destroyed much of the Seal Beach Municipal Pier. The Conservancy, in March of 1984, authorized a grant of up to \$88,000 to the city to help in the restoration of the pier. On May 16, 1985, the Conservancy provided a reimbursable grant to the city of \$250,000 to replace the restaurant at the end of the pier. The rebuilt restaurant will be located on the same site and have substantially the same purpose and capacity as its predecessor.

Also in May 1985, the Conservancy authorized a grant of up to \$630,000 to the county of Sonoma for commercial-fishing support facilities (fuel storage

tanks and distribution system, an ice-making machine and storage system, and a seventy-ton mobile lift) at Spud Point Marina. This action would augment a previous Conservancy grant for the construction of docks and public access facilities. Upon completion, Spud Point Marina will provide affordable berthing space for commercial fishing vessels and essential onshore support facilities. Sonoma County will be finishing construction of the marina this summer.

Also in May, the Conservancy approved an augmentation of the city of Santa Monica's grant for restoration of the Santa Monica Pier with the additional sum of \$350,000. The restoration of the Santa Monica Pier is about to enter its first phase of construction, which includes a children's playground, a terraced park, and commercial facilities to be funded by the Conservancy grant. The initial project has been eagerly anticipated since 1982 when the Santa Monica Pier Restoration Program was approved by the Santa Monica City Council and the Coastal Conservancy.

At its March 21, 1985 meeting, the Conservancy also approved two "initial resolutions" for the purposes of the California Urban Waterfront Area Restoration Financing Authority (CUWARFA) Act: one for the Inn of Morro Bay visitor-serving and public access project and the other for the Monterey Plaza public parking structure. These resolutions declare that the projects may qualify for tax-exempt revenue bond financing under the CUWARFA Act, and they encourage the applicants to submit detailed project plans for Conservancy consideration. □



CONFERENCE LOG

Editor's Note: Professional conferences tend to have short half-lives. Although conference papers are often published, summaries of proceedings are usually not distributed to those attending, much less to the interested public. As a new feature of *California WaterfrontAge*, Conference Log will provide summaries of waterfront-related conferences.

Shoreline Erosion

On February 6-8, the California Coastal Commission sponsored a conference to try to establish some direction for the state's future shoreline erosion programs. The commission is concerned that the regulatory approach available to it has limitations, and that other approaches are needed if public beaches are to remain usable into the twenty-first century. Joining the commission as co-sponsors were the State Coastal Conservancy, the Department of Boating and Waterways, the Corps of Engineers, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Senate Office of Research. In addition, the conference drew over forty-five speakers from various technical and political arenas and over 260 interested people in attendance.

The clearest consensus that arose from the conference was that California's beaches will not survive without nourishment—the artificial replenishing of sand lost through erosion. Conference participants for the most part felt that beach nourishment programs (in effect, dumping sand) are preferable to structural solutions (such as breakwaters), and in some cases are cheaper as well. How beach nourishment should be carried out is a much more difficult question, and given the institutional axes the various participants grind and the ever-present “turf” battles among state agencies, the debate on that issue was surprisingly tame.

Presently, beach nourishment and management is carried out entirely on an ad hoc basis. This ad hoc approach has been surprisingly effective, given the magnitude of the problem. Historically, beaches were replenished naturally by sediment deposited from rivers and streams flowing into the ocean. However, dams and other measures to control watersheds have drastically reduced this flow of sediment into the ocean. According to the Department of Navigation and Ocean Development's (now Boating and Waterways) “Study of Beach Nourishment along the Southern California Coastline,” average annual sediment production between the Orange/San Diego County line and the Mexican boundary has decreased from 6,868,000 cubic yards of sand to 1,489,000—or less than twenty-two percent of historic production. Reductions in other areas are not so dramatic, but thirty-nine percent of the watersheds feeding the San Luis Obispo-Santa Barbara area, more than twenty percent of the watersheds feeding Ventura County's major delta, and over sixty percent of the watersheds feeding Los Angeles and Orange Counties are controlled. With the natural flow of sediment reduced to this extent, it is astonishing that we still have any beaches at all.

The only thing that has offset these dramatic losses in sand has been major nourishment efforts by various parties. In the past forty years, massive amounts of sand have been deposited on beaches from Ventura County to the Mexican border. Much of this nourishment has been done by the Corps of Engineers. In two areas, Oceanside and Surfside-Sunset, the corps has a long-term responsibility for nourishment stemming from the construction of navigational facilities during World War II. However, the remainder of the nourishment efforts have been one-time shots, often tied to dredging and



Encinitas, San Diego County

construction projects such as Marina del Rey or the Los Angeles International Airport. Such nourishment is unlikely to be repeated; even if another marina is built in southern California, the sediments will almost certainly be used to raise development areas. Even the corps' responsibilities at Oceanside and Surfside-Sunset remain discretionary. In all cases, alterations to the watershed play a major role in the plight of the beaches, and the appropriations to perform work are entirely up to Congress.

The philosophical outlook of the observer—and of the legislative bodies—will play a major role in whether beach nourishment continues on an ad hoc basis. It has been argued by those suspicious of government that the ad hoc efforts of the past have succeeded, and that it is more efficient to plan for beach nourishment when problems become

critical rather than to institutionalize another public works program. It does seem clear that the problem is too complex jurisdictionally for local government to handle beach nourishment without some ad hoc creativity.

Apportioning an equitable amount of the costs of beach nourishment to those responsible for the problem and to those benefitting from the solution will likely be one of the most challenging political science puzzles of this field. The governmental jurisdictions responsible for modifying watersheds are generally not those who bear the brunt of the effects; in some areas over a dozen governmental entities are responsible for activities that affect the shore. It was argued persuasively at the conference that altering a watershed benefits millions of people (by providing water supplies and reducing flood risk) at the same time that the

alterations threaten our beaches. It was also argued that those who dwell on the shoreline receive a larger benefit from nourishment efforts and should help pay. The problem is tangled, but the stakes are high: without some continuing program of beach nourishment most of the beaches in southern California are doomed.

Other featured topics at the conference included the need for better data, or at least better access to existing data, the continuing debate over the benefits and limitations of structural solutions, the continuing debate over the effects of public projects on private lands and of private projects on public lands, and the question of who owns the beach and the sand.

The two latter topics proved to be especially controversial. In all cases, the public owns the land below "ordinary high water." However, there is no clear legal or technical consensus in California on exactly what or where that is. Presently, most California courts interpret ordinary high water to be mean high water, which changes seasonally. Thus, in California, the boundary between public and private property is an ambulatory line, and seawalls are sometimes located seaward of the winter location of that line—on what would be public property if the seawall were not there. Private seawalls can therefore reduce public beach land; on the other hand, it is generally public projects that have interfered with sand movement and starved beaches to the





Sand mining on Monterey Bay shore

point where private owners need seawalls. Courts in some other states are heading in different directions. A recent Florida case concluded that an ambulatory boundary line was not acceptable as a property law concept, and concluded that "the winter and most landward mean high water line must be selected as the boundary between the state and the upland owners." Ownership of accreted land is another area where there is uncertainty; under California law accretion caused by artificial nourishment is public but under federal law such accretion goes to the upland owner.

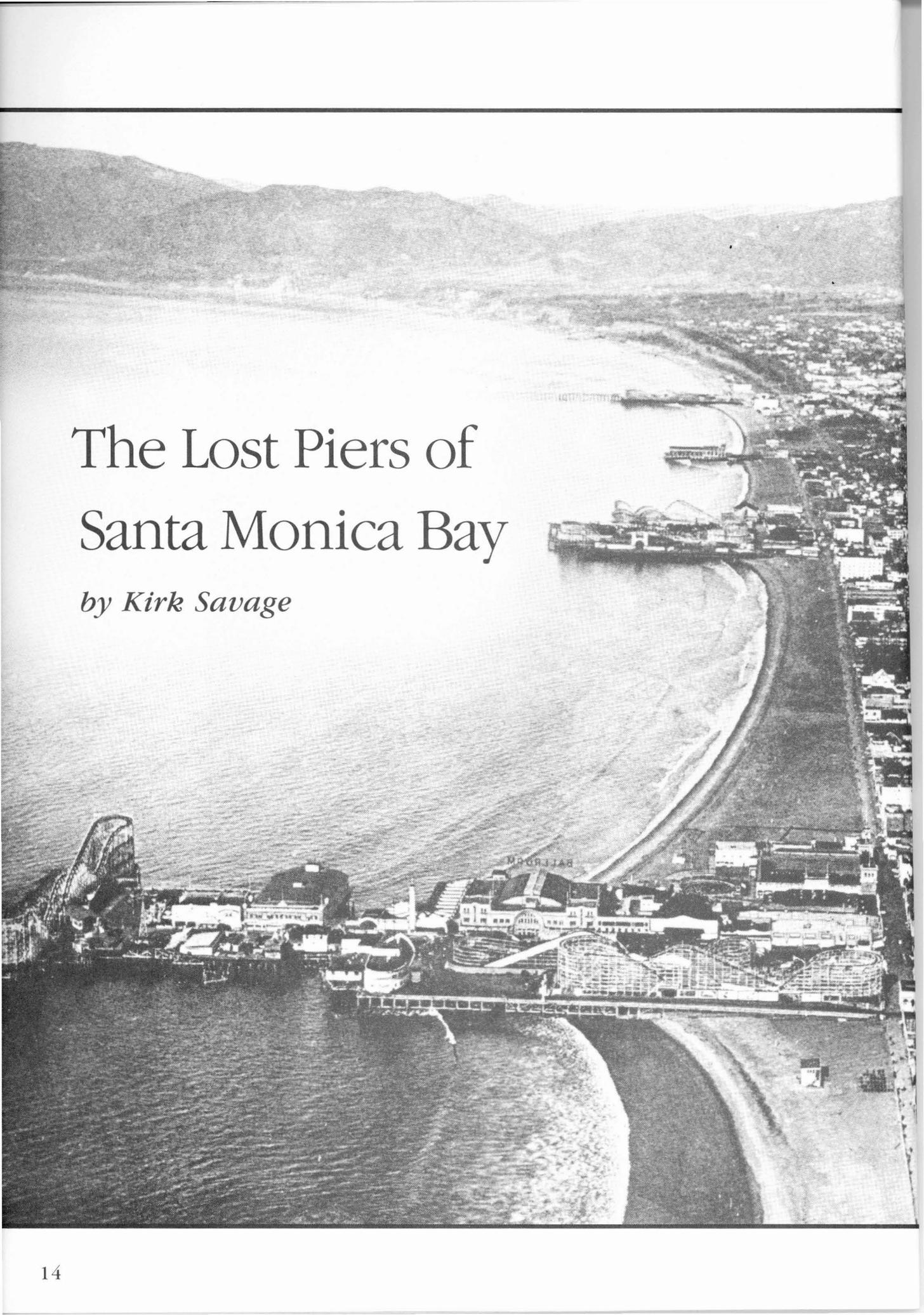
Mining of beach sand along eroding shorelines is another controversial topic. Gary Griggs of UC Santa Cruz reported that over 300,000 cubic yards of sand are being mined each year from the surf zone

along Monterey Bay while certain areas within the bay are eroding at over ten feet each year. One suggested approach for dealing with such losses of sand was to establish a system of "sand rights" analogous to water rights. Perhaps innovative concepts such as "sand rights" will have to be tried in California to deal with present problems such as existing dams and long-standing sand mining operations.

Final editing of the conference proceedings is nearly complete, and we hope to have them available in July. Those interested should contact Jim McGrath at the Coastal Commission, 631 Howard Street, San Francisco, CA 94105.

—Jim McGrath

□

An aerial, black and white photograph of Santa Monica Bay, California. The image shows the coastline from the ocean on the left to the city and mountains on the right. In the foreground, the Santa Monica Pier is visible with its iconic roller coaster, the Santa Monica Beach Hotel, and other buildings. The ocean waves are breaking onto the sandy beach. In the background, the city of Santa Monica is densely packed with buildings, and the Santa Monica Mountains rise in the distance. The text "The Lost Piers of Santa Monica Bay" is overlaid on the left side of the image, and "by Kirk Savage" is written below it.

The Lost Piers of Santa Monica Bay

by Kirk Savage

THE TOWN OF Santa Monica was born at a wharf—a wharf its promoters hoped would establish “the commercial center of the southwest.” In early 1875 a fledgling railroad called the Los Angeles and Independence, ready to compete with Southern Pacific’s little port in San Pedro, built a 1700-foot wharf on approximately the site of today’s Santa Monica Pier. There, steamships from San Francisco would deliver goods and passengers onto trains bound for the pueblo of Los Angeles, some twenty miles inland. Speculating on success, the L.A. & I. mapped out an elegant town around the new wharf; enough people believed in the scheme to buy out the lots in a public auction.

Although the railroad’s commercial enterprise was not destined to last long, the town which sprang up around it was. Southern Pacific’s ruthless tactics soon drove the L.A. & I. out of business, but not before the paper lots within walking distance of the wharf had filled up with hotels, restaurants, saloons, and other entertainments. After Southern Pacific tore down the wharf in 1879, it kept these businesses alive by running passenger trains down the old L.A. & I. right-of-way to the demolished landing. Visitors could enjoy not only the usual establishments but also a plush bathhouse equipped with a plunge (or pool), hot steam baths, a bowling alley, and a skating rink.

Still, the townspeople were not satisfied with becoming a summer resort; they were convinced that their prosperity depended on a new wharf to attract ocean commerce. Throughout the 1880s the town agitated for a commercial landing. Several schemes were proposed, but Southern Pacific managed to thwart them all. Then, in 1891, the railroad abruptly reversed itself and decided to build its own wharf in Santa Monica. By this time the Santa Fe had penetrated southern California and broken Southern Pacific’s monopoly. Collis Huntington, the head of the embattled railroad, figured that to beat back the competition he must shift his port away from the shallow natural harbor at San Pedro to the deeper waters of Santa Monica Bay.

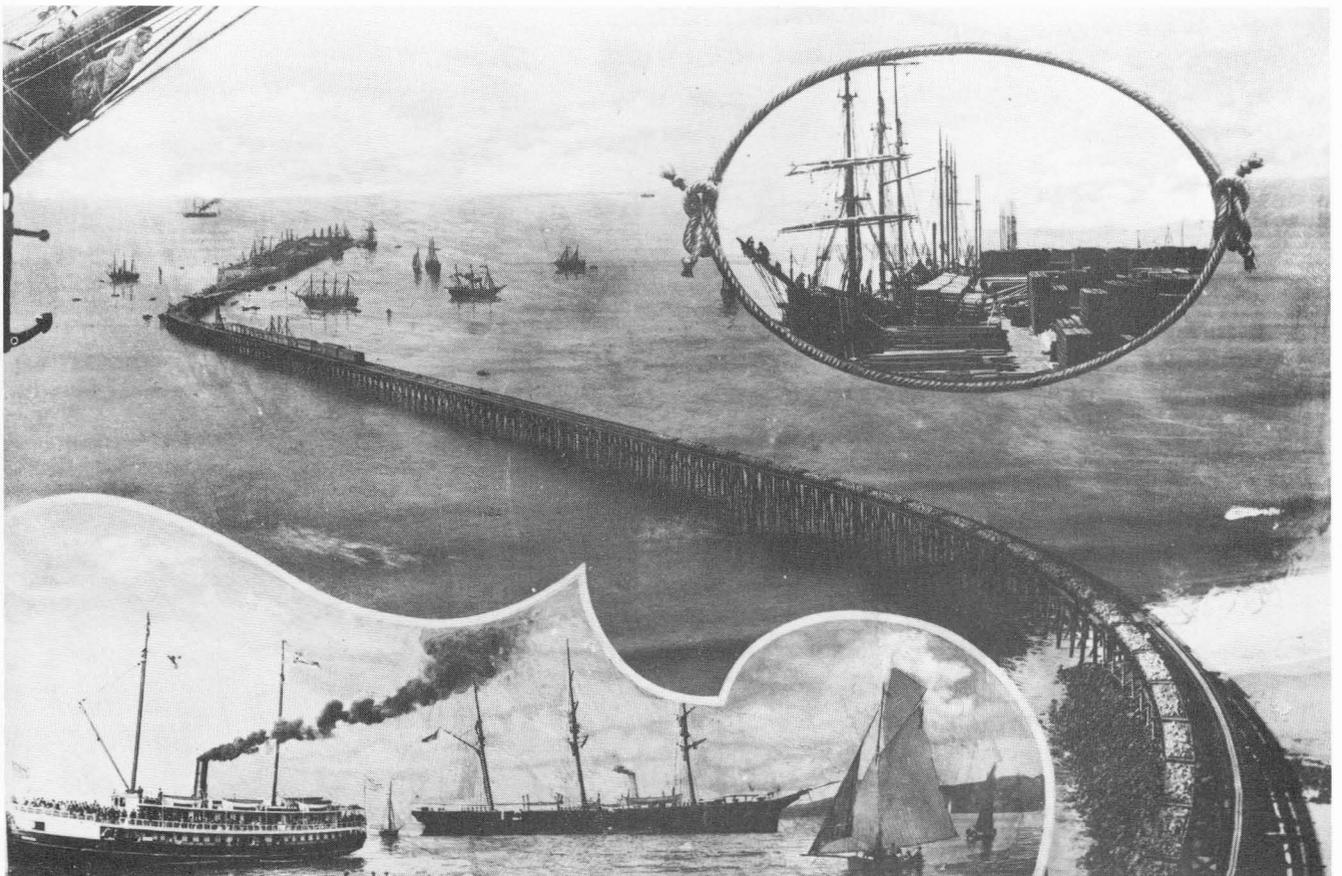
At the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon, a mile north of town, Huntington began work on the longest pier in the world. When completed in 1893, the “Long Wharf” curved like a snake to a seaward end 4700 feet out, where coal bunkers, warehouses, and a restaurant were located. “Port Los Angeles,” as Huntington cleverly named it, did indeed begin to take over much of the Los

Angeles shipping traffic. It was also an instant tourist attraction. Special trains brought thousands each summer weekend to fish, walk the length of the pier, watch ships, and eat in the restaurant. The region's most important commercial wharf was also its first major pleasure pier.

Unlike the old L.A. & I. wharf, however, the Long Wharf was too far removed from the center of Santa Monica to bring much business activity directly into town. Huntington had chosen to bypass the town in order to sew up more right-of-way and bar future competitors. Now that Santa Monica's residents finally had their wharf, they decided that they needed something more: a full-scale harbor. With Huntington's support, the town spent several years fighting San Pedro for a federal appropriation. In 1897, when Congress decided in San Pedro's favor, Santa Monica's hopes of becoming a commercial port were extinguished once and for all.

Santa Monica's defeat in "The Great Harbor Fight" marked a decisive shift in the role of wharves in the community. Only one year later a few citizens formed

Commerce at the Long Wharf, 1891



the Santa Monica Beach Improvement Company and built a “pleasure wharf,” for fishing and strolling, several yards north of the old L.A. & I. landing. The new wharf connected to a shoreline boardwalk lined with a pleasing clutter of bathhouses, tents, stores, and small-scale entertainments. The boardwalk ran south from the wharf past the opulent Arcadia Hotel and down to the new community of Ocean Park, where a second pleasure wharf was built in 1898. This simple, 1250-foot structure, erected by Abbot Kinney on the pilings which supported Santa Monica’s sewer outfall, was the first in a series of ever more extravagant piers which lasted until the 1970s.

At the same time the fishing and pleasure functions of the Long Wharf began to supplant the purposes for which it was originally built. In 1899 a Japanese fishing village sprang up just north of the wharf, which the fishermen used as a landing platform to unload their catch. The village also became a summer resort—with two hotels—for Japanese living in Los Angeles. In 1908 Southern Pacific abandoned the wharf and leased it to



The first pleasure wharves, 1898: Ocean Park (above) and Santa Monica (below)

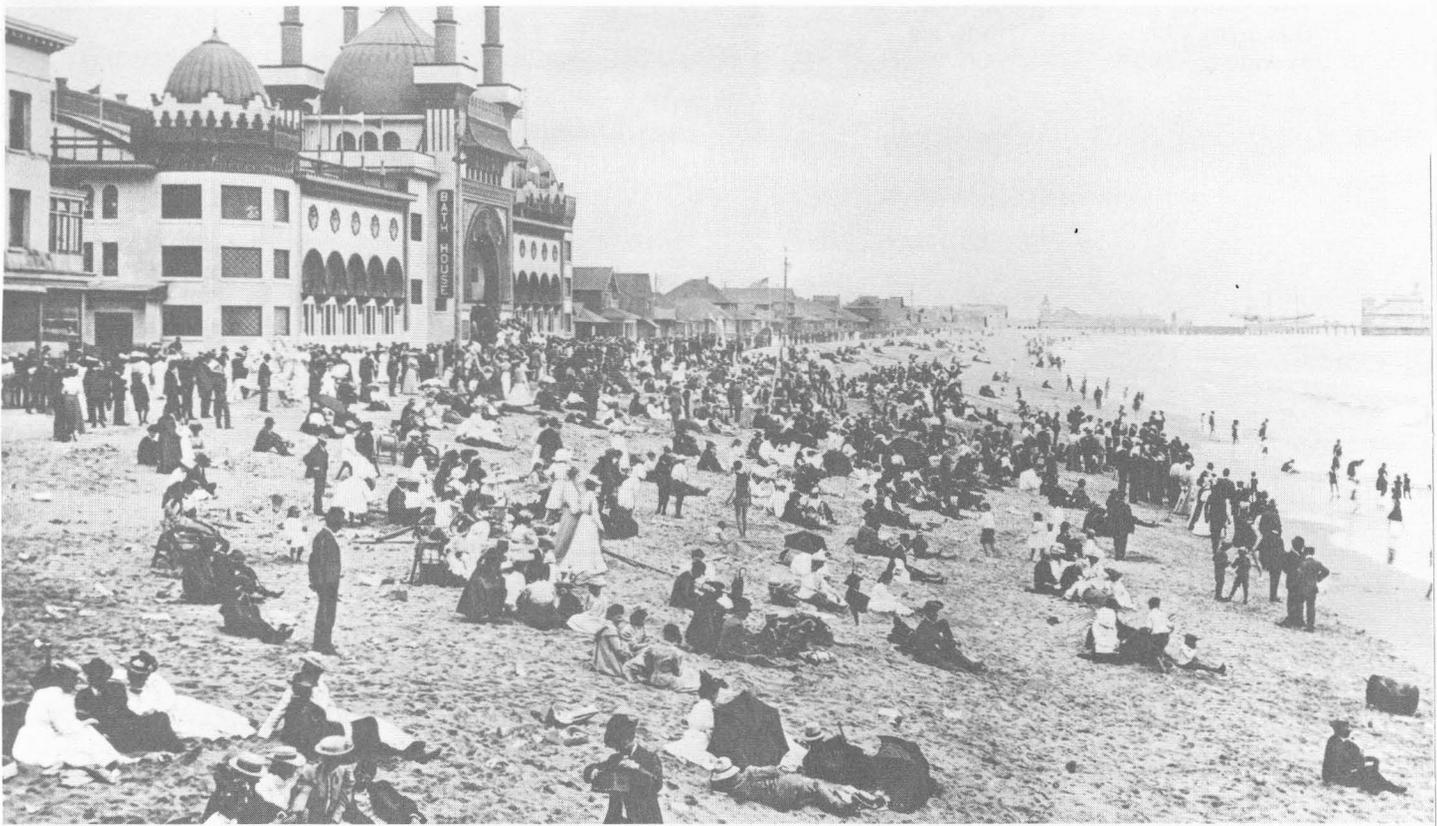


the Los Angeles and Pacific Company, which used it for a trolley run advertised as "an ocean voyage on wheels." The run was popular for several years until landslides and rising maintenance costs finally forced Southern Pacific to demolish the pier.

The harbor in San Pedro had made commercial wharves elsewhere obsolete, and had forced seaside towns like Santa Monica to concentrate on promoting their image as beach resorts. With an interurban trolley system bringing more people to the coast every year, the resort towns competed aggressively for new business. In this entrepreneurial climate, the old-fashioned wharf dressed up as an "amusement pier" would prove to be an ever greater social and economic force than the commercial landings so desperately sought by Santa Monica and its neighbors.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA by no means pioneered the amusement pier. Resort promoters latched onto a tradition originating in England in the early 1800s. At that time, visitors to the seaside often had no intention of getting wet; ocean "bathing" was a novel activity, and thick wool suits made even the least ambitious swimming positively dangerous. The first pleasure piers simply offered vacationers a way to promenade over the surf in full and fashionable dress. Later, pier operators learned that they could attract more customers by interspersing these open promenades with concessions, and piers became the foundations for fanciful pavilions made of iron and glass. Atlantic City in the late nineteenth century remodelled this English tradition in the style of Coney Island. By 1900, several major amusement piers there were competing against each other with playful architecture, roller coasters, and big-name entertainers. Women diving astride horses, typewriters 1000 times life-size, and other carnival curiosities became commonplace.

It is not surprising that promoters in southern California, eager to lure population from the East Coast, would adopt the new type of pier made popular in Atlantic City. Yet the man most responsible for the amusement empire in Santa Monica Bay was not a carnival huckster, but a cultivated heir who saw in real estate a way to advance his social and educational aims. Abbot Kinney spent his early years in California studying forestry and parks, analyzing the Indian reservation system, and developing his theory of "creative reproduction," a belief

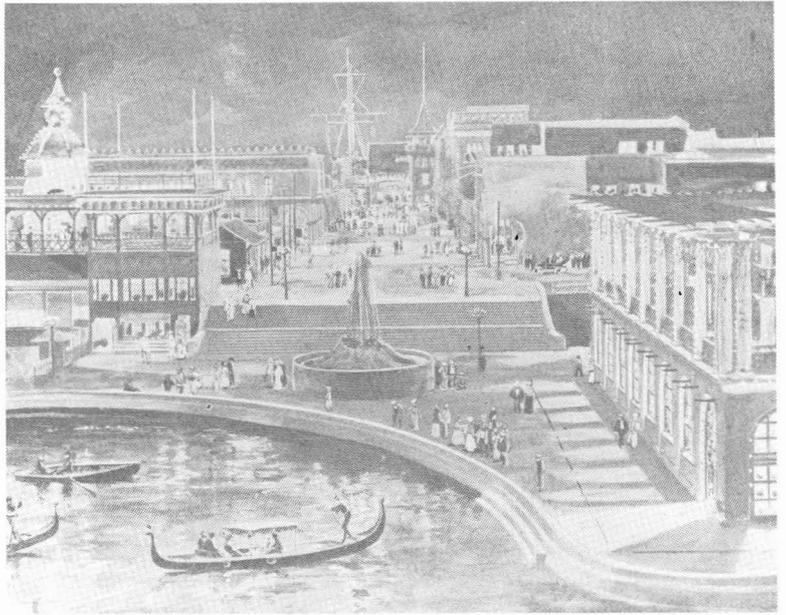


Uninterrupted beach links Ocean Park with the Venice pier (in background), c. 1905.

that evolution could be improved by proper mating in a congenial and cultured atmosphere. In the early 1890s, he turned his attention to real estate by developing what was then considered a worthless stretch of sand dunes into the popular cottage settlement of Ocean Park, in the southern reaches of Santa Monica. The aforementioned sewer-outfall pier, an empty deck for fishermen and strollers, followed in 1898; Pier Avenue, the approach to the wharf, grew into a business center rivaling Santa Monica's.

In 1904, only two years after embarking on ambitious plans to rebuild the wharf and add a large pavilion, Kinney surprised everyone by selling off his stake in Pier Avenue and the wharf and taking sole interest in the undeveloped marshlands to the south. Kinney was now ready to carry out a remarkable scheme for dredging a system of canals and erecting an ideal community called "Venice of America." By the summer of 1905, the dream was complete: there were canals navigated by Italian gondoliers, streets lined with pedestrian arcades, and a huge pier complete with a pavilion at the entrance, an auditorium at the end, and a ship-hotel

The Venice pier's ship-hotel anchors this artist's view down Windward Avenue, c. 1905.



docked in the middle. The Windward Avenue pier and its massive structures were an essential part of Kinney's plan to create the right sort of evolutionary climate. There, townspeople could dance in the pavilion, drink on the ship, and otherwise enjoy themselves; but they could also listen to foreign concerts and educational lectures in the auditorium, or visit a "\$20,000 aquarium," reputed to be a research facility. In Venice, amusement and edification would be mingled in a kind of perpetual world's fair.

Unfortunately for the dream, Kinney found that enlightenment could not be made to pay. The lecture series was soon dropped, and cultural exhibits from foreign countries were replaced by more blatant carnival concessions. The pier remained for awhile the central town meeting-place, where "brilliant" society dances were held at the pavilion and political meetings went on at the ship-hotel, but as time passed by the carnival atmosphere came to dominate. In 1920 a fire wiped out the pier, and the reconstruction effort represented the complete triumph of the amusement element. The formerly open pier, in the English tradition, had allowed strollers to enjoy the ocean air and view as they walked between a few structures spaced far apart; the rebuilt pier, however, was organized around an amusement "midway" lined on both sides with a continuous row of rides and concessions. The new pier sacrificed its role as the town's social center in order to

attract more visitors, yet at the same time it established itself even more firmly as the city's economic mainstay.

Some of the impetus for intensifying the amusements on the Venice pier came from vigorous competition less than a mile away. The Ocean Park pier, which Kinney had abandoned in 1904, began to promote itself almost immediately afterward. A "scenic railway," or roller coaster, was accommodated in 1905, years before the Venice pier could boast its own. In 1910, the wharf was rebuilt as "Fraser's Million Dollar Pier," patterned after its extravagantly expensive namesake in Atlantic City.

As the Venice and Ocean Park piers competed, they expanded enormously, growing in width to one or two full street blocks. Their amusements evolved far beyond simple rides on roller coasters or ferris wheels to a realm of fantasy and drama which anticipated "theme parks" like Disneyland. Pleasure seekers could take a ride "Over the Falls" or through the "Coal Mine," visit "Noah's Ark" or the "Japanese Tea Parlor," or experience

The carnival triumphs
on the Venice pier, c. 1920.



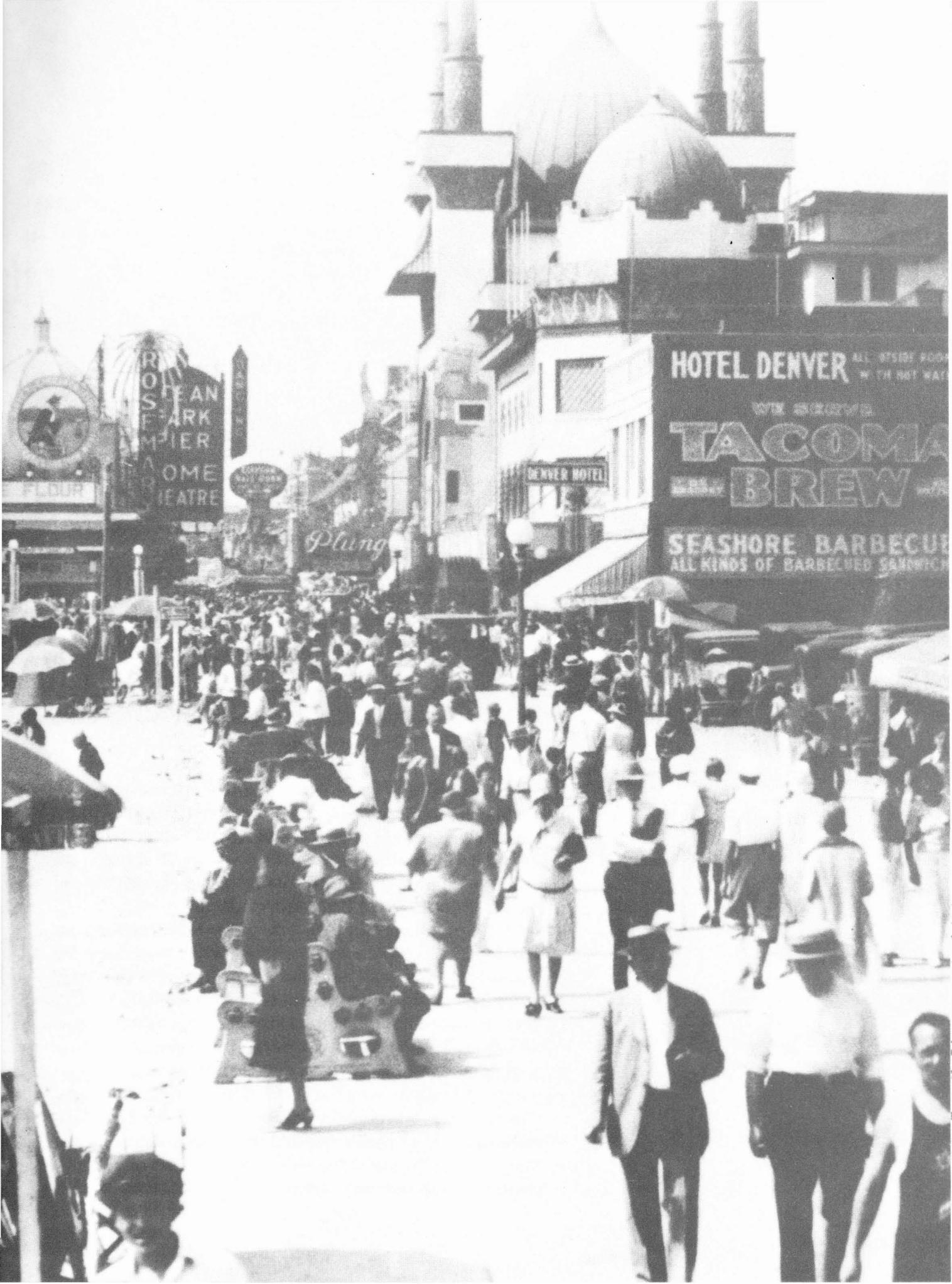
“The Titanic Disaster” or the topsy-turvy world of “Toonerville,” a western shanty-town gone beserk.

While the piers themselves became big business, the streets surrounding each turned into one large pleasure precinct, filled with an increasingly lively clutter of hotels, cafes, theaters, and game parlors. By 1920 Ocean Park was so crowded that its fabulous, Byzantine-domed bathhouse, once the undisputed king of the pier district, was almost lost in a mass of projecting signs and structures. At Venice the approaches to the pier remained more formal architecturally but just as dense with people and entertainments. Three-story buildings, colonnaded at ground level and embellished above with sculpture and fenestration reminiscent of Old Venice, marched down Windward toward the pier and turned along Ocean Front Walk.

Feeding off the foot traffic to and from each pier, the neighboring businesses extended the pedestrian realm of the pier into the surrounding community. Even the nearby residential streets, built with the earliest piers, were largely pedestrian courts, lined with small bungalows. Venice was especially geared for people on foot; the canals, dotted with fashionable homes and crossed mainly by narrow footbridges, made automobile travel almost impossible. For decades the town relied on trolleys to bring in the crowds, and it even had a miniature railroad looping through the canal district which served both as a tourist attraction and as a transit system for residents.

At the end of World War I, Santa Monica added a third major amusement pier to the constellation created by Venice and Ocean Park. The Loeff Pier, though not so ambitious or so innovative as its two competitors further south, was justly famous for the magnificent peaks and valleys of its Blue Streak Roller Coaster, the giant La Monica Ballroom, and a hand-carved carousel which survives today. The Loeff was built right up against Santa Monica's municipal pier, an old-fashioned deck for strolling and fishing originally erected out of a 1907 bond issue. (The pleasure wharf built in 1898 vanished sometime early in the century.)

With Santa Monica's addition, the amusement empire reached its highest pitch in the 1920s. Six pleasure piers crossed the shoreline between Venice and Santa Monica: the three carnival piers, the lone municipal wharf, and two smaller piers, one occupied by a ballroom and the other by a huge restaurant. Together, the



HOTEL DENVER ALL-STEEL ROOMS WITH HOT WATER

WE SERVE

TACOMA BREW

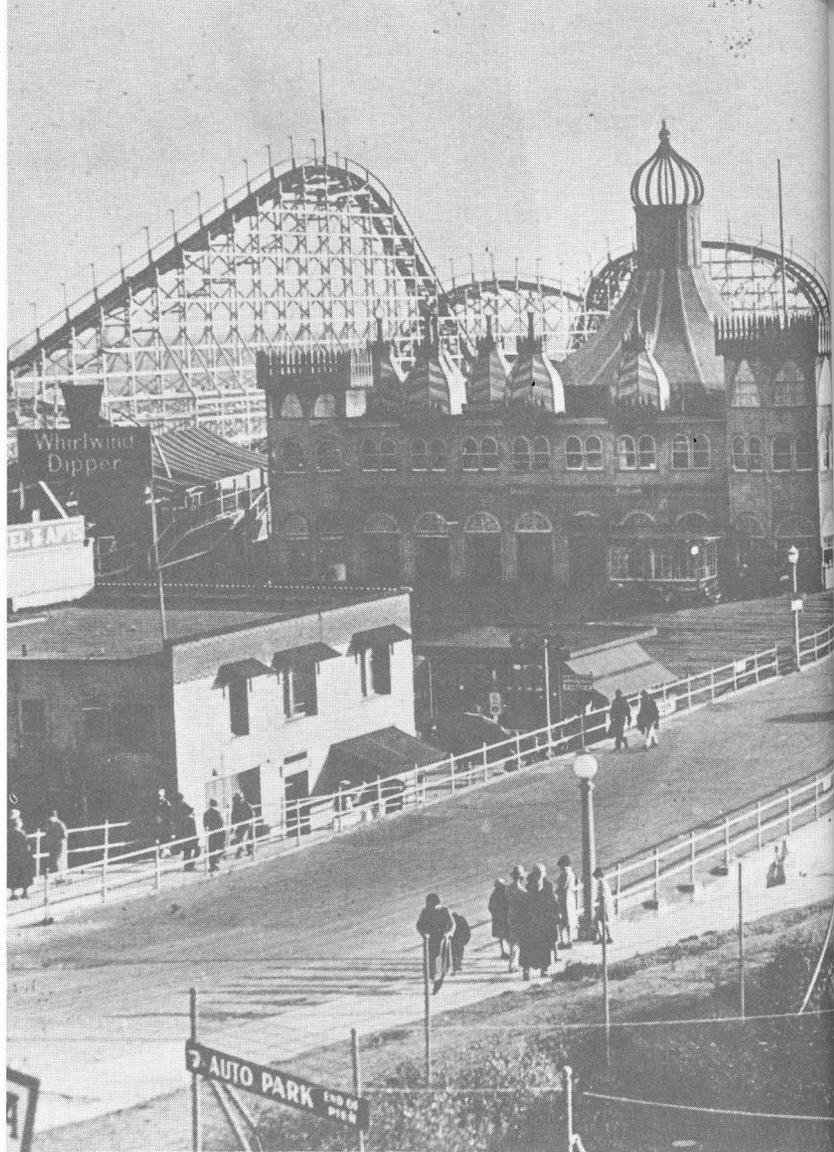
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ROSEAN PARK PIER HOME THEATRE

Plung

DENVER HOTEL

Santa Monica's combined amusement and municipal pier, c. 1925.



piers featured prominently in southern California's feverish promotional campaign to attract people to the coast. The promoters were smart; despite the newfound popularity of scanty bathing suits, swimming, and beachcombing, the piers still drew weekend crowds that were almost suffocating.

Yet the very amusements which served to attract people to the coast ended up irritating many of those who chose to stay. No one claimed to oppose economic growth, but a large contingent—especially in Santa Monica—wanted to channel growth into a proper “city of homes” instead of a honky-tonk town of cheap thrills and fantasies. Ironically, the same town which had agitated so much for a wharf in the late nineteenth century now considered them harmful. Conflict arose almost as soon as the first pleasure piers were built. Battles were fought over liquor licensing in the amusement areas; Santa Monica stamped out alcohol in the 1910s, while



Venice stayed wet, inspiring some critics to charge that the pier lured servicemen into “debauchery” during World War I. When Venice voted to merge with Los Angeles in 1925—over the opposition of the amusement interests, who didn’t like L.A.’s blue laws—the town’s own “city of homes” faction gloated at the defeat of those who supposedly lowered residential property values.

Only a few years later, however, the conflict in Venice suddenly became irrelevant. In 1929 oil was discovered there, and many of the old “city of homes” boosters rushed for permits to spoil their own backyards. The oil derricks which sprang up everywhere hurt the city’s image far more than its amusements ever had. But elegant Santa Monica continued to worry about the “class” of people attracted by the inexpensive entertainments at its piers. Much of the Ocean Park amusement district lay within Santa Monica’s city limits, and the successors



1930s brochure

of the Loeff Pier, though scaled down, continued to draw crowds. Little could be done until urban planning and federal money offered the tools of redevelopment. Thus armed, the town eventually succeeded in obliterating all traces of the Ocean Park amusement area, and nearly succeeded in demolishing its combined amusement and municipal pier to the north.

THE SLOW DECLINE of the amusement piers began during the early years of the Great Depression. It was an especially hard time for lesser piers such as Santa Monica's Loeff, where shrinking attendance forced the closure of the Blue Streak Roller Coaster and most of the amusement "midway." At the same time, pier operators had to face a growing influx of automobiles, not easily accommodated in areas geared to foot traffic. The dramatic contours of the Blue Streak were knocked down to make room for a parking lot, while Ocean Park built a five-acre lot on pilings over the sand. The canals which gave Venice its name and much of its charm were largely filled and paved, in part to enable cars to reach the pier more easily. These adaptations helped the piers to survive, but they did not erase the difficulties arising from an increasingly mobile population with more and more competing entertainments. Meanwhile the neighborhoods surrounding the piers began to slip into a quiet decay, which proved attractive to low-income, predominantly Jewish immigrants looking for pleasant, inexpensive homes.

As the piers began to lose their economic clout, and the social composition around them began to change, they became increasingly vulnerable to political attack. In the early 1940s, the planners took their turn. Los Angeles' 1945 development plan for the Santa Monica Bay shoreline, a grandiose scheme to widen the beaches and accommodate the triumphant automobile, called for the removal of all the piers between Venice and Santa Monica. Wide beaches would make the piers "outmoded"; amusement zones could be relocated more conveniently on the sand near giant parking lots, reached by elegantly flowing parkways utterly at odds with the dense pedestrian districts that still existed. The city had its first chance to act on the plan in 1946, when the lease on the Venice pier expired. The city quickly condemned the pier, and demolished it within a year. The amusement zone on the sand never materialized.

The Ocean Park pier was trickier, because it straddled

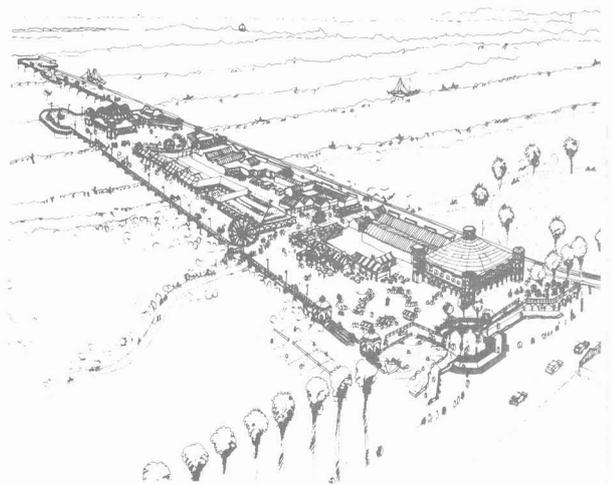
the border between the two jurisdictions of Santa Monica and Venice. In 1957 the pier got a reprieve when CBS secured a lease and embarked on a massive effort to convert the pier into a major amusement park. Pacific Ocean Park, POP in the local parlance, was a disastrous failure, a victim probably of the urban decay which surrounded it and which compared most unfavorably to the sparkling clean suburban parks like Disneyland. While the pier was still standing, the city of Santa Monica proceeded to tackle its share of the urban decay by leveling the tight pattern of bungalows and business establishments on its side of the border. The pier went bankrupt anyway, and was removed in 1975.

Thirsting for more redevelopment, the Santa Monica City Council voted in 1973 to demolish the municipal pier and its adjoining amusement pier, the last one operating in the area. This action represented the last hurrah for the defenders of the "city of homes"; they were no longer in tune with the general citizenry, which responded by electing a new council that pledged to save the pier. But saving the pier proved to be no simple task. After several years of studying alternatives and not reaching consensus, the city called upon the State Coastal Conservancy to hold a series of public community design workshops. The workshop process finally culminated, in 1982, in a set of guidelines which seek to restore the traditional role of the pier.

Working with these guidelines, the firm of Moore Ruble Yuddell/Campbell & Campbell has drawn up an inspired plan which would help bring back some of the lost glory of the amusement era. Under the plan, the parking lot where the Blue Streak used to stand would be replaced by an outdoor cafe and an expanded amusement zone, including a ferris wheel. At the ocean end of the amusement area, a carnival tent and plaza would hold special events; at the beach end, a strong pedestrian entrance would be created with stairways leading through an octagonal plaza to a new deck surrounding the restored carousel. Just below the plaza, a children's park carved out of the sand would complete the link between the entertainments of the beach and those of the pier.

In 1983 this ambitious plan received a temporary setback when winter storms tore away the ocean end of the municipal half of the pier. Protecting the pier from further storm damage will require structural work estimated in the millions of dollars.

1983 proposal for Santa Monica Pier





Santa Monica Pier

WALKING DOWN the beach toward the Santa Monica Pier today, one mourns the old roller coaster which gave such dramatic form to this long, low structure. With only the turrets of the restored carousel to catch the eye during the daytime, the pier is seen to greatest advantage at night, when it is slung with electric lights. Some of the old carnival excitement remains: bumper cars assault each other, the shooting gallery pops, breakdancers jerk and spin, and video games sound off next to ancient pinball machines. This is no haven for the affluent, but a place attracting a genuinely mixed crowd.

Further down the beach, nothing is left of the Ocean Park pier except for “underwater obstructions,” announced by four signs posted in the sand. The avenues which used to serve as approaches to the pier, once packed with bathhouses, plunges, hotels, and restaurants, are no longer even streets; they have been replaced by a fenced, high-security condominium development. But just across the border into Venice, the carnival atmosphere suddenly reappears—alive and well. Venice residents could never agree on a plan for wholesale demolition, and the incremental redevelopment which has proceeded for decades has not fundamentally altered the scale or feel of what was once

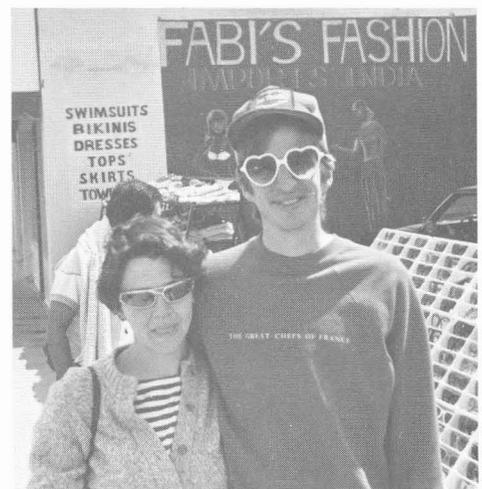




Ocean Front Walk, Venice

called “the acropolis of fun seekers” and “the pied piper to all glooms.” Ocean Front Walk is still a pedestrian’s paradise. The atmosphere created by street musicians, tarot card readers, flea market hustlers, and sidewalk loungers reaches a crescendo at Windward Avenue, where the spirit of the old pier seems to survive. In its place, the ugly new Venice Pavilion, enlivened by some of the best graffiti west of the New York subways, offers a video arcade and a regular backdrop for now world-famous roller skating exhibitions. Some of the original arcades along Windward still remain to lead the eye toward this weekend festivity.

The greatest of the amusement piers, “Atlantic City’s only rival,” the old Venice pier has left a tradition of fantasy, spectacle, and simple pedestrian pleasures—a tradition which still dominates the life of the community. Despite the town’s physical decay and the conspicuous absence of any pretensions to enlighten or educate, Abbot Kinney would surely be pleased to see that the festival he created in 1905 has indeed proved to be perpetual. □



Kirk Savage was a frequent visitor to Pacific Ocean Park in the 1960s. He is leaving his position as senior editor of *California WaterfrontAge* for graduate school in art history at UC Berkeley.



RECREATION



Editor's Note: Now that summer is here, the waterfront's recreational role is particularly topical. In addition to millions of recreational diners and shoppers on our urban waterfronts, over sixty million people will visit coastal parks in the California State Park System. California's former State Parks Director and the leader of the underwater parks effort here present their unique perspectives on recreational opportunities on and under the waterfront.



Waterfront Recreation

by Pete Dangermond

PAUL THEROUX in *The Kingdom by the Sea* describes a journey which he took around the coastline of England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Wherever he went, he noticed a recurring phenomenon:

They sat in their cars and stared out at the sea. They were on every beach road. They always faced the water. They were not birdwatchers or ship-spotters. Indeed, they did not seem to be looking at anything in particular.

Theroux muses about this at times throughout the book, wondering if the reason is Britain's historical attachment to ships and the sea or its nostalgia for an era when the United Kingdom touched all the seas of the

world. If Theroux had visited California's coastline, however, he would have noticed the same phenomenon. What he interprets as one nation's association with the sea may simply be another example of water's universal magnetism.

In California we have a tremendously rich diversity of watery places, many in urban areas: the white sandy beaches of Los Angeles and San Diego and the rugged Big Sur coast; San Francisco Bay and the Delta; Lake Tahoe and the Salton Sea; the falls of Yosemite and the Sierra mountains; lakes, white water rapids, and lazy rivers in the San Joaquin Valley; natural estuarine marshes and man-made reservoirs. Together, these areas provide a seemingly endless variety of opportunities for recreation. In addition, we are continuously inventing new kinds of recreation, and even the totally uninventive can sit in their cars and stare out to sea.

Given such universal appeal, there is no need to advocate waterfront recreation. However, the public should be made aware of certain needs and concerns which must be addressed if we want to continue enjoying those qualities we take for granted.

IN 1864, through an act of Congress, Yosemite Valley became the first national park in the world. During the next sixty years a few additional places were recognized and set aside for public use. It wasn't until the late 1920s, however, that a concerted statewide effort was begun to set aside our prime beaches, historic sites, redwoods, and other inland natural areas. Since that time, approximately one fourth of California's coastline has come under state ownership. In recent years, land values have increased so dramatically that ever-increasing public investments have purchased smaller and smaller amounts of coastal frontage.

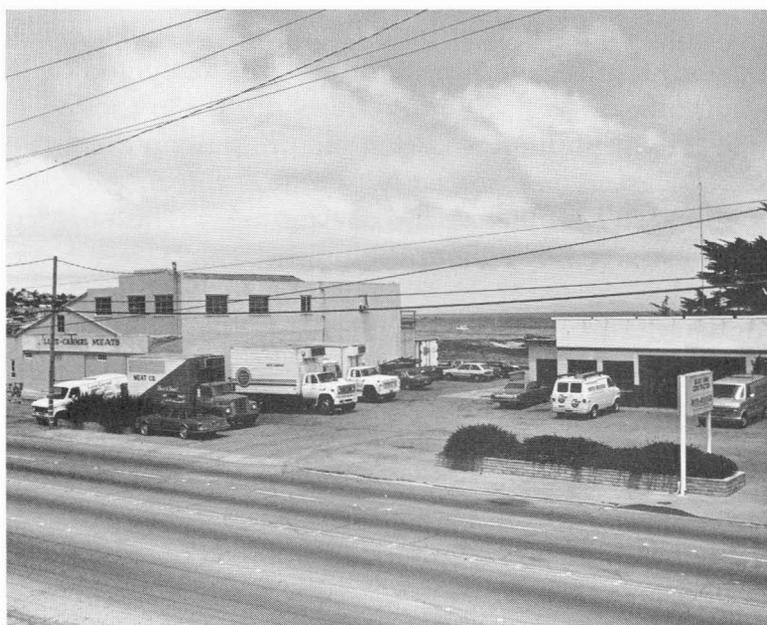
The drastically diminished effectiveness of acquisition dollars has encouraged a closer look at other priorities for parks money, particularly ways to protect and enhance already purchased public lands. As it turns out, this reordering of priorities is both necessary and timely.

During the push for acquisition many very fine coastal areas were purchased. Yet some have received only minor improvements, and others no improvements whatsoever. In order to honor the promises made when these areas were acquired, a priority should now be placed on their development. The most notable

example in southern California is Topanga State Beach, where numerous cabins and houses were purchased and cleared at a very high cost, but only a dirt parking lot and chemical toilets have been provided for the public. North of Santa Cruz, the Wilder Ranch, consisting of miles of coastline and thousands of acres, is totally undeveloped and fenced off to the public.

Many underdeveloped coastal parks can be greatly enhanced by small, strategic additions of land. An example is a project being spearheaded by the city of Monterey, known locally as the "Window on the Bay." Virtually no one knows of the existence of Monterey State Beach, an unimproved but beautiful sandy crescent stretching from the city's new wharf to the neighboring town of Seaside. The city, helped by grants from the Coastal Conservancy, has begun the effort of providing views to the beach and areas for support facilities by purchasing some underutilized commercial properties just inland. When completed, this project will open up a hidden resource and increase the public use many times. In time, the beach will probably become a major spot for windsurfers and Hobie Cat enthusiasts, who will provide color and life right next to the concentrations of people at Monterey's wharf and waterfront.

Acquisition funds still available at the federal, state, and local levels should be directed to such additions and inholdings in order to maximize the value of present public lands throughout the state.



Commercial strip blocking Monterey State Beach



GENERALLY, THE public thinks that when a park or beach area becomes publicly held it is "protected." We are now coming to realize that the value of these resources can be diminished or even destroyed through outside forces or neglect. Parks can suffer from erosion of beach sand, unnatural changes in vegetation, overuse and erosion of upland areas, water pollution, and incompatible adjacent land uses.

Protection of our present parks is not exactly glamorous, headline-grabbing work. It compares to land acquisition as changing the oil in your car compares with buying a new one. However, park protection is just as important as maintenance on your automobile. The analogy ends with the thought of purchasing a new car after you have neglected the old one and let it become inoperable. Where do you buy a replacement for Big Sur or Huntington Beach? We must modify our "throw away" mentality when it comes to our natural resources.

We must work for the long-term continuity of our public resources, even if the solution reaches into some polluting farmer's field or creates restrictions on the levels of use at certain facilities. Many of these solutions cost money, and in the past funds have rarely been allocated. The 1984 Parklands Bond Act included two firsts in this regard: funds were allocated for both storm damage repair and natural systems restoration within the state parks system. Studies should be conducted on the long-range needs at both the state and local levels for such funding, and it should then be budgeted on a regular basis.

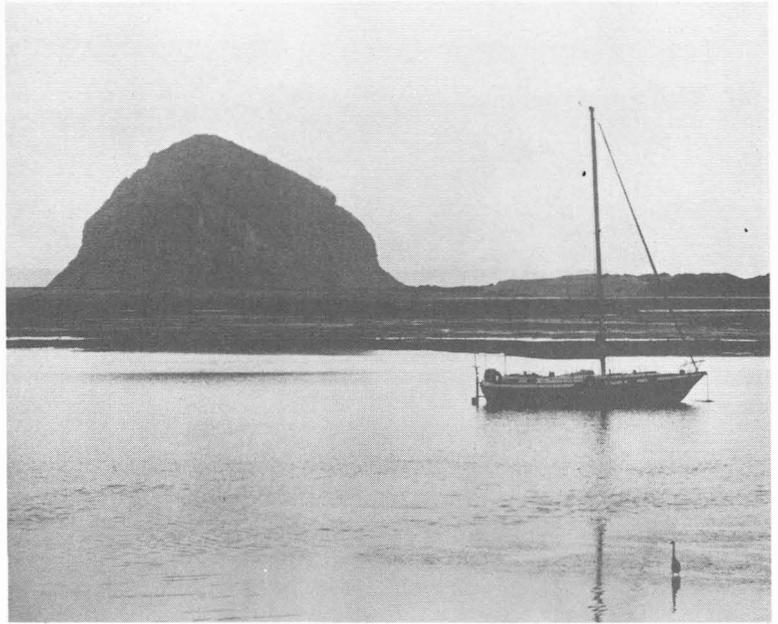
Excellent public recreation facilities along the California coast are few and far between. The average facility is rundown, outdated, and overcrowded. This neglect is a disservice not only to the public which uses these areas, but to the private landholders nearby whose property is made less desirable. Our coastal areas are simply too valuable to be treated in this manner. A major rehabilitation and upgrading effort, similar to that being made for the state highway system, is in order.

The 1984 Parklands Bond Act has taken the first step. There is a need, however, for at least another \$150 million of immediate capital outlay, plus a commitment to future outlays to avoid another recurrence of our present situation.



THE COAST IS not the only waterfront attracting millions of visitors every year. For many Californians, reservoirs, lakes, rivers, and streams offer special or more convenient spots for recreation. Reservoirs are particularly important; for years the state has encouraged their recreational development. Still, some remain closed to the public, such as Lake Mathews, the largest one in southern California, or Crystal Springs Reservoir, south of San Francisco. And we know far too little about how the public uses reservoirs that are open. The state should take an active role in arranging public use of closed reservoirs and in studying the most desirable and effective ways to accommodate future demands on all reservoirs. This kind of study should include a user survey and a comparative analysis of recreational facilities and their management.

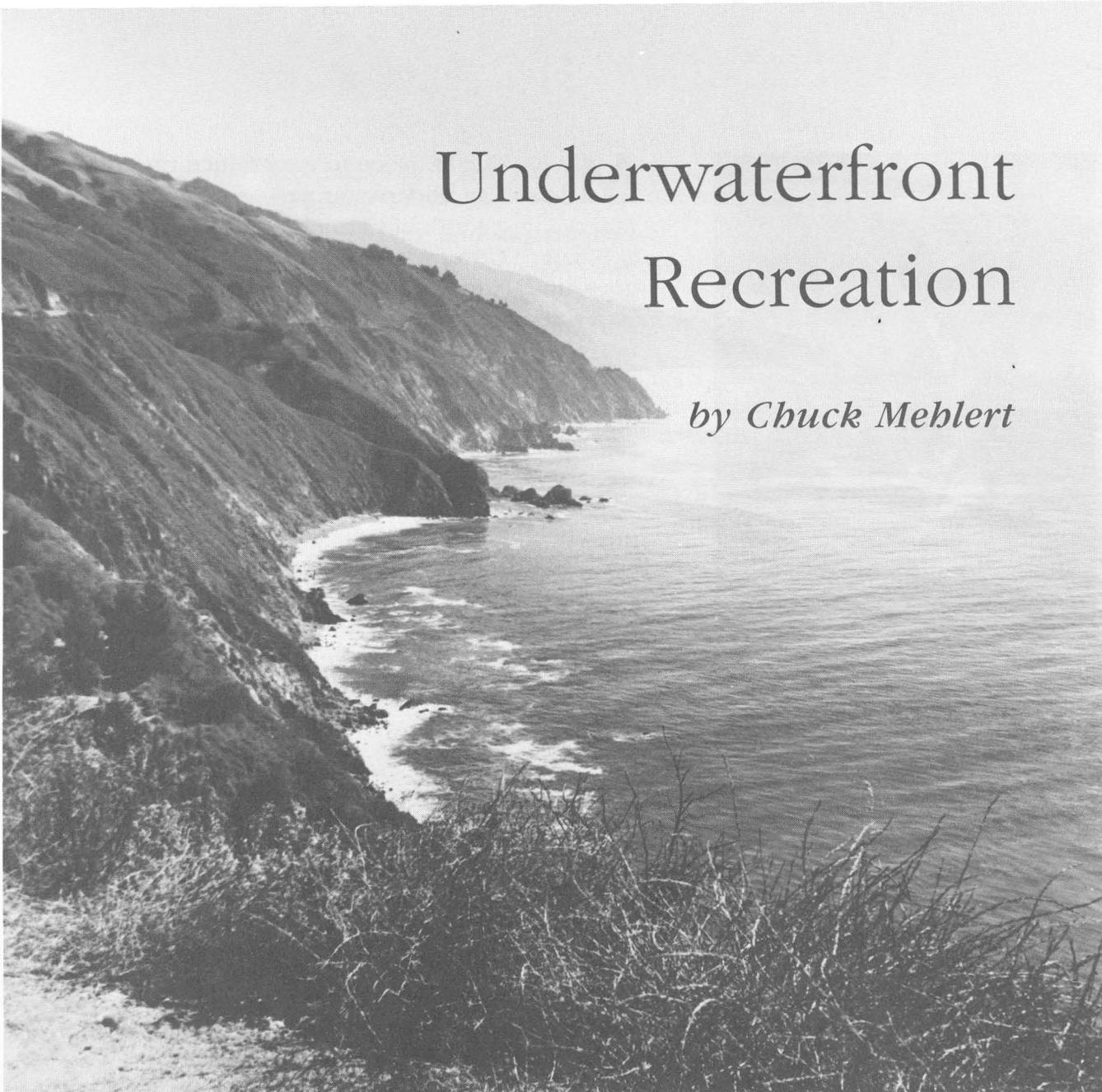
Crystal Springs Reservoir



As for rivers, can anyone imagine how valuable the Los Angeles River would be today if it had been protected the way the American River has been through Sacramento County? Instead it was totally destroyed—turned into a huge concrete ditch. We cannot undo the damage done in the major metropolitan areas, but now is the time to start thinking and acting on behalf of our rivers in present growth areas in the state. Deserving of attention are the upper Sacramento River, the Kern, and numerous other rivers near or adjacent to emerging cities. Instead of sinking these rivers in concrete channels, the public should acquire the flood plains and waterfronts to provide a natural and agricultural richness for the future urban environments of the state.

All of California's waterfront areas deserve special care and use, yet even some of the most attractive are closed, poorly maintained, or threatened by urbanization. While some efforts to correct these problems have been initiated, most notably in the 1984 Parklands Bond Act, we need to direct more attention and more investment toward them so that we leave an enjoyable environment for future generations. □

Pete Dangermond, the former Director of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, is now a private consultant in Sacramento.

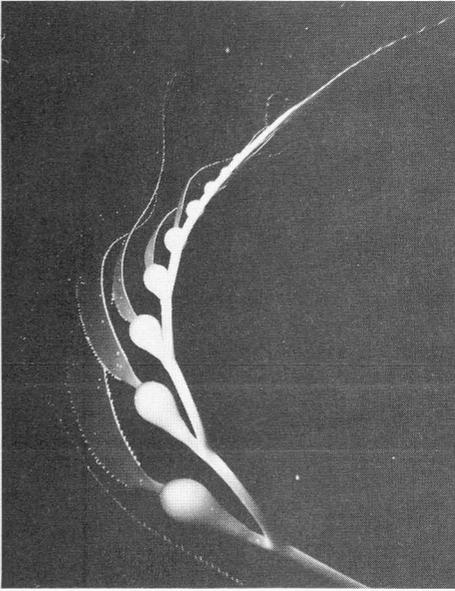


Underwaterfront Recreation

by Chuck Mehlert

THE JUNCTURE of hills and sea at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, in Big Sur, forms one of the most famous stretches of public coastline in the world. But few know that these sheer cliffs and narrow beaches make up only a part of the public's preserve. Beneath the surface of the water, invisible to the ordinary visitor roaming the land, lies another vast park, also controlled and protected. It is one of twelve underwater parks pioneered in California over the last twenty-five years.

These parks serve some 375,000 scuba divers and probably twice that number of snorkelers. They also offer a valuable way of teaching the public, whether diver or not, about the huge realms of marine life which thrive just off our celebrated shorelines.



Kelp stipe

MY FAVORITE place to experience the quiet wonders of an underwater park is at Point Lobos State Reserve, just south of Carmel. I usually enter the water at Whaler's Cove, where long strands of bright green eel grass undulate gracefully in the constant surge of the water. Immediately as I slip beneath the surface, silence takes over; the only sound comes from the bubbles rising from my own breathing apparatus. The eel grass is thick, and a host of colorful invertebrates hide in its protective cover. At this depth everything is brilliant and seems to sparkle in the reflected light of the sun.

Working my way down, weightless, I leave the eel grass behind and enter the kelp forest. Shades of green and blue predominate; water, which is 800 times as dense as air, filters out the reds, yellows, and oranges of the light spectrum. The sunlight filtering down through the surface canopy of the kelp gives the feeling of being in a dense redwood forest. Still, there is ample room to glide between the kelp stipes, which sometimes grow two to three feet a day from their "holdfasts" in the rocky bottom. Natural light fades dramatically as I glide deeper into the kelp forest. The plants and animals take on a bluer hue. Rockfishes predominate: whether singly or in schools, they are everywhere going about their business, each unmindful of the presence of foreigners in their territory. A playful harbor seal seems to want to engage in a game of tag. A seal lion pretends to dive bomb, then flashes off to more challenging pursuits. Further down, rocky reefs are covered with colonies of small anemones, shaped like flowers. They have stinging cells at the end of their tentacles that either kill prey outright or render them helpless. There are also various species of starfish, corraline algae, and sponges. I am now at the outer edge of the kelp bed in about seventy feet of water. The color of the marine life has been reduced to a dull monochrome of blue and gray.

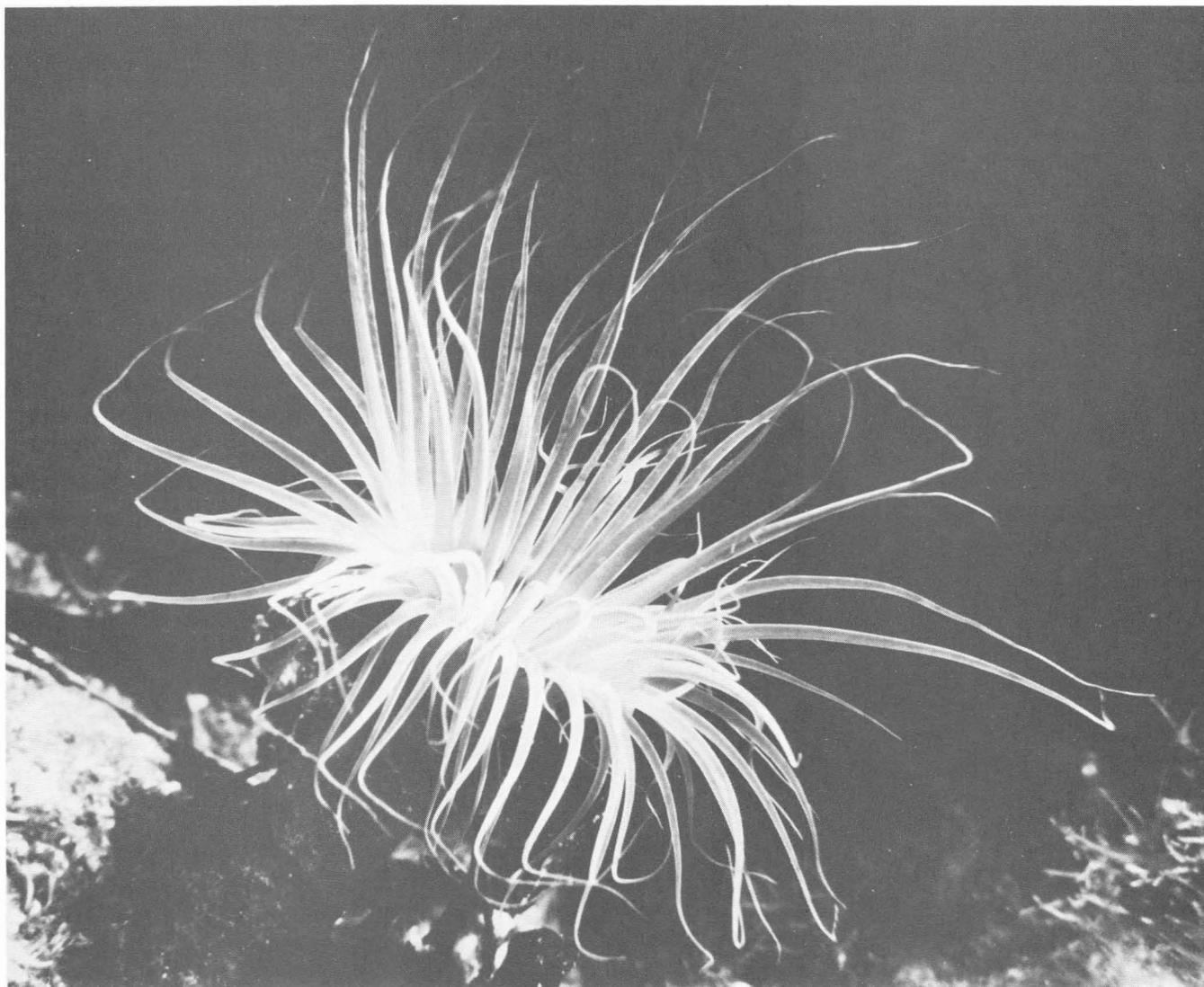
From now on, I use my underwater lights. As soon as they are switched on, the whole scene becomes alive with brilliant colors. One of the great unanswered questions of nature is why marine life has such brilliant colors when no living organism, as far as we can determine, can see them without artificial light. One wonders what function these naturally invisible colors serve.

In deeper water, beautiful purple hydrocoral beds beckon. Also at this depth, between ninety to one hundred feet, is the gorgonian coral, a so-called soft coral

often growing to two feet tall. The outer skeleton is calcareous and coral-red. Living within its "branches" are yellowish-white polyps. When undisturbed and feeding, the polyps are all fully extended and the colony becomes a beautiful white tree-like display. When disturbed, the polyps withdraw as one, leaving only the red coral skeleton as a reminder of the colony living within.

Leaving the rocky reef area, I glide over a sandy bottom, the favored habitat of flatfishes, sea pens, and sand dollars. Also here are two voracious scavengers: the common starfish, finishing up a morsel of dead crab, and the sea cucumber, plodding methodically along the bottom cleaning up detritus as it goes. This invertebrate is the "vacuum cleaner" of the sea.

Tube anemone



The bottle of air strapped to my back is now almost empty; I must hurry back. The kelp forest is crossed again, and as I ease up to the surface the sun reappears in its full brilliance.

UNTIL TWENTY-FIVE years ago, Point Lobos State Reserve extended no further than the mean high-tide line. Through the efforts of underwater photographers, sport divers, and marine biologists, the Department of Parks and Recreation came to realize that below that line an unusual world existed, a world so fragile that it could be destroyed by thoughtlessness as well as by actual abuse. Without fully knowing the quality and extent of the resource, but knowing it had to be preserved, the department requested the State Lands Commission to transfer 775 acres as offshore marine wilderness. Title was turned over to State Parks on April 15, 1960. On July 1 of that year, the State Park Commission officially recognized the marine lands as an addition to Point Lobos State Reserve, and at the same time



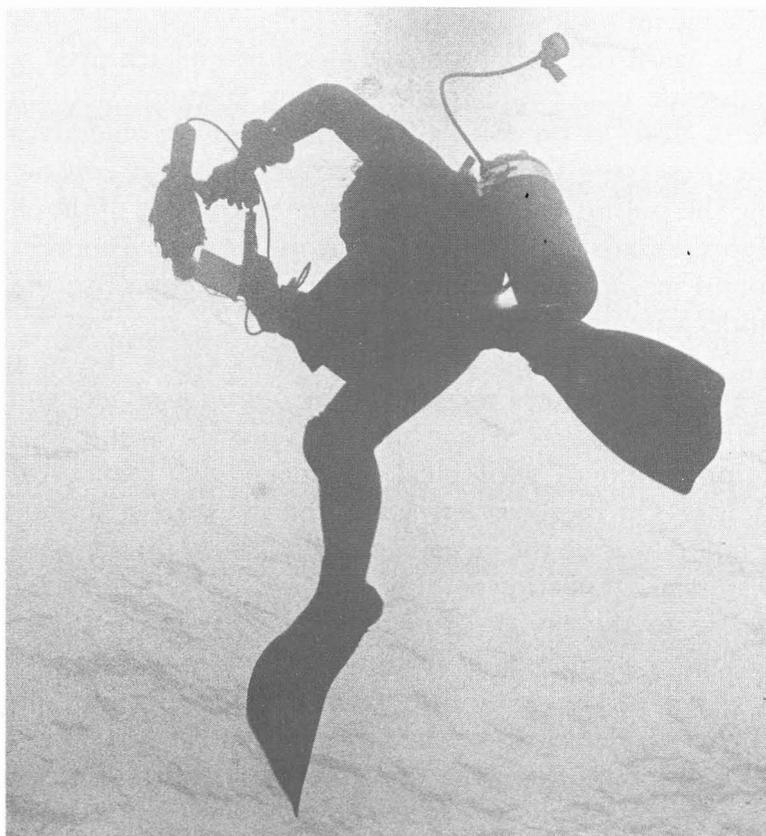
approved the agency's first rules and regulations to manage an underwater area.

In 1968 the department decided to embark upon a statewide underwater park program. Director William Penn Mott, Jr. drew up a list of far-reaching objectives for preserving vital underwater resources and enhancing the public's understanding and enjoyment of them. Representative examples of various natural resources found in each seascape province would comprise the underwater park system.

Today, the state's underwater parks cover the four seascape provinces recognized by oceanographers and marine biologists. These divisions are the result of a combination of geological, chemical, and biological factors. On the broadest scale, the decreasing surface temperature of the ocean as one proceeds northward results in a transition at Point Conception from the Temperate to the Boreal Zone. The temperature gradient produces a remarkably abrupt transition in marine life, so that natural communities on either side of Point Conception are often composed of different species. A second, much more subtle, transition in species is known to occur in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay, and a third transition occurs at Cape Mendocino.

Some of the underwater parks have not only interesting marine habitats, but noteworthy geological or even archaeological features. At the Fort Ross Underwater Park in Mendocino County are the exposed remains of the Pomona in about twenty feet of water. This early coastal steamship sank in 1908, and for years has been a favorite of divers to explore and photograph. In April 1981, divers located three other shipwrecks in the area after a proton magnetometer search was conducted by State Parks. These ships were mapped on a surveyed grid system as a permanent record, which will become a key element in the future underwater archaeological interpretive program.

Interpretation is essential in expanding the public's appreciation and understanding of underwater areas. At Point Lobos, for example, the interpretive program is geared both to those who dive and to those who stay ashore. For divers and snorkelers, a special underwater book is available to identify the marine plants and animals they encounter. For the less adventurous, rangers conduct guided shoreline tours. During these tours the public has an opportunity to explore tidepools, observe the sea otter, and watch the gray whale migrations.



MANY ADDITIONAL underwater areas are under consideration for park status. One of the most exciting possibilities is the area off Cannery Row. An underwater park here would be especially fitting, now that the Monterey Bay Aquarium has caused an explosion of interest in the marine resources of the area. It would ideally complement the aquarium in its mission to focus on the marine habitats of Monterey Bay.

Not yet included in the state's marine parks are representative examples of rivers and lakes. State Parks is now focusing its attention in this direction. Already Lake Tahoe has been investigated. The investigation team recommended the Emerald Bay area of D. L. Bliss State Park as an underwater park, but before an official announcement is made, a program of education for high-altitude diving must be worked out.

Hopefully the search for other underwater parks will continue. These parks offer not only an unusual recreational resource but an opportunity to make the public a little more aware of the vital processes at work on much of our planet's surface, below the tide and beneath the waves. □



Chuck Mehlert regularly dives off the coast of California. He was the first parks director for the state of Alaska and is now the oldest parks ranger working in California. He lives in Monterey.

BOOK REVIEWS

Waterfront Survivors

Great Piers of California: A Guided Tour. Jean Femling. Capra Press, 1984. \$7.95

Piers and the structures they carry are essentially ephemeral architecture, succumbing frequently to fires, storms, and economic change. Many of California's most interesting piers have vanished completely or have changed past recognition. It is a pity that we don't have a guidebook to California's piers written in 1920; then there were Disneyland's over the surf, great steamship landings, whole piers devoted to ballrooms and restaurants.

Today's considerably more homogeneous batch of piers is quite well described in Jean Femling's text. While Femling has a sense for journalistic detail and historical anecdote, her book should not be read straight through; the material is simply too repetitious. One should use the book rather as a guide—to piers on route or to piers that spark a particular interest.

After a brief introduction, the book launches into a series of three- to four-page chapters on each major pier from San Diego to Crescent City. Taken together, the chapters provide a great deal of information on piers in general, but the information is scattered. The introduction is far too short, leaving the reader to chance upon an important topic such as structural design against waves in the entry on Pacifica, page 116. The book's focus on individual piers is intentional, but many readers would probably have preferred to see more of the interesting material brought together in a full introductory essay.

For a guide, this book is surprisingly well researched. Many of the entries are devoted largely to historical detail, which exhumes some of the earlier and



more interesting piers (though more historic photographs would have been appreciated). If Femling focuses on anecdotes at the expense of serious historical analysis, one should not expect too much from a guidebook. For those interested in a deeper treatment, the bibliography does refer to some very important historical works. Unfortunately, the chapters tend to avoid some of the interesting recent history of the piers; the political disputes over the Santa Monica Pier and Stearn's Wharf in Santa Barbara, for example, are hardly mentioned.

Since this is a guidebook, it should have included more practical information for the tourist. For example, the book could have identified restaurants by name and rated them. Readers will not learn here that the best place to get squid on the wharf in Monterey is Abalonetti's.

The book's most serious failing, however, is its design. In a word, it is ugly. The photographs are uninspired and poorly reproduced, the maps are crude at best, and the layout is about as imaginative as that in a typical government report. Piers may not be the most beautiful structures in the world, but they deserve a better presentation than this.

—Kirk Savage

Coastal Tales

California Currents: An Exploration of the Ocean's Pleasures, Mysteries and Dilemmas. Marie De Santis. Presidio Press, 1985. \$15.95

Many people wouldn't expect to pick up a book on marine science and policy and find it hard to put down. But *California Currents* is just such a book. Marie De Santis, a former commercial fisherman with a Ph.D. in chemistry, is the rare scientific storyteller. She manages to weave anecdotes and serious issues into a highly engaging and informative book.

California Currents introduces the reader to several people whose lives are intricately tied to the California coast. Through their eyes and De Santis' voice, we learn about a myriad of coastal issues, including the problems of California's important, but beleaguered, fishing industry; the potentially disastrous impacts stemming from ever-increasing diversions of Sacramento River water away from San Francisco Bay; and the difficulties of making policies for the ocean when our knowledge of the sea and its inhabitants is so limited. Along the way, the reader is charmed with stories about fishing, slime eels, and individuals who have single-handedly influenced ocean policy.

De Santis develops her themes in such an entertaining way that not until the end of the book does the reader realize that it is actually a vast store of information on the coastal environment. To help explore the subject even further, De Santis provides a reference list of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, professional associations, and educational resources. Unfortunately, the list contains a few inaccuracies and some major omissions. Hopefully, later printings of the book will contain a corrected and expanded reference section.

California Currents is readily understandable to laymen, but challenging even to professionals and activists long

concerned with the coast. It is one of the most entertaining yet educational tours of the California coast presented to date.

—Alyse Jacobson



Celestial City

The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design. Anne Spirn. Basic Books, Inc., 1984. \$25.95

Anne Spirn, a professor of landscape architecture at Harvard University, has written a poetic plea for a more sensible approach towards our urban environmental problems. She eloquently makes the case that the city is not detached from nature but is a unique type of ecosystem that must be understood by planners, developers, and citizens if it is to thrive.

The Granite Garden is a how-to manual for managing the urban ecosystem. Drawing on a voluminous body of knowledge from many different disciplines, much of it recently published, Spirn examines in turn the air, earth, water, and life that comprise the urban environment. Using historical and contemporary case studies of cities from Stuttgart, Germany to Dayton, Ohio, she shows how some cities have reduced air pollution, floods, and landslides and increased water quality, open space, and

wildlife habitat by recognizing the potentials and limitations of the urban ecosystem. Unfortunately, urban ecological planning has been fragmented for the most part, if it is done at all.

While not addressed as a separate issue, the waterfront is examined in many of the book's examples of good urban ecological planning and design. One of the pioneering planning documents involving urban ecology was the 1975 Toronto Waterfront Plan, which used information on climate, air quality, noise, physical geography, water, vegetation, and wildlife to help guide development of the waterfront. Mention is also made of Arcata's unique attempt to combine a sewage treatment plant with the restoration of a saltmarsh. The use of floodplain parks and plazas to reduce flooding damage, notably in Denver and Boston, is also highlighted.

The Granite Garden ends with two visions. One, the "Infernal City," describes the future destruction of the city by the lack of comprehensive environmental planning, while the other, the "Celestial City," gives the rosy view of gardens on every rooftop, clean air and water, and streets that serve as urban forests. While not everyone may agree that the latter vision is an "achievable reality," *The Granite Garden* is a step in the right direction. Anyone who works with or cares about the urban environment should read this book. Both the text and the extensive bibliography give food for thought on how to plan for and design a more livable city.

—Stuart Cook

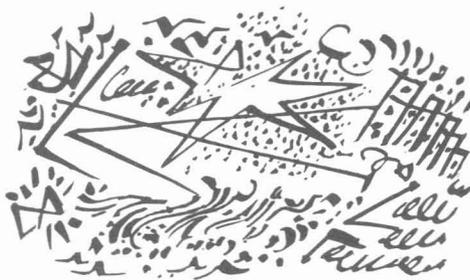
The Newest Venice

Real Estate as Art: New Architecture in Venice California. Written by Joseph Giovannini; "produced" by Tom Sewell. Sewell Archives, 1984. \$9.95

Real estate is master in Los Angeles. The history of the area is often described as one long series of real estate booms. During those booms most people have

simply been interested in making easy money. But certain visionaries—like Abbot Kinney in Venice—have tried to capitalize on the fever for land speculation and direct it toward cultural or artistic aims. Perhaps this is what Joseph Giovannini means by "real estate as art," though you would never decipher that meaning reading this rambling and self-conscious book.

Venice is now in the throes of a renaissance of sorts. After Abbot Kinney had dug its canals, erected its Italianate structures, and turned it into probably the most famous coastal resort in the west, the town suffered an equally abrupt decline when the canals were paved for autos and oil was discovered



in backyards. Venice became a refuge for elderly immigrants, then a hangout for beatniks and hippies. Today, an influx of artists and hip professionals has produced another real estate boom and has made Venice a laboratory for architectural experiments.

Real Estate as Art is a survey of those experiments. It is not interested in history, which is relegated to one column of the first page (and to a few cursory references to earlier Los Angeles architects). The book is most decidedly current, tossing off references to such fleeting notions as the "West Beach/Palm Salon/Charmer's aesthetic." The sophisticated but chatty text is as much concerned with the people who make the buildings as with the buildings themselves. At the beginning of the book we are introduced to the architects by small photos and brief descriptions; at the end, the photos are enlarged to full page



size. In between, the text acquaints us with the “multi-nondisciplinary” Rodger Webster, a real estate man in tank top and cowboy hat; David Lowe, who designed a garage to accommodate international shipping containers because he believes all one’s possessions should fit into them; Michael Lipson, who eschews the aforementioned aesthetic in favor of “architecture trouvee”—homes built out of parts salvaged from his Mar Vista junkyard.

The book is a frank celebration of architectural chaos; as Giovannini correctly observes, Venice is already so heterogeneous that it can absorb just about any architectural shock. Some of the buildings illustrated here are indeed shocking, but many are genuinely interesting. Frank Gehry’s contributions are well known to those who follow southern California architecture, but less expected are buildings such as the Dou-

mani Beach House by Robert Graham, composed of clean, elegantly detailed cubes with lofty spaces and generous windows. The more funky “back alley” homes, whether made of salvaged junk or designed to look that way, also have a certain appeal—and a certain harmony with the oil-stained, weed-strewn concrete reality that remains in present-day Venice.

Although the book is annoyingly trendy and self-absorbed, it does present a body of architectural work that is refreshing when compared with the insipid formulas of much of the “custom” housing built on the southern California coast. People looking for architectural inspiration may not always find the Venice work pleasing, but they should certainly find it stimulating.

—Kirk Savage



Backwater

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and military cooperation which brought invaluable resources into public use. Under the Reagan administration, the federal government no longer offers obsolete facilities to other agencies at no cost. Shoreline land and facilities are now auctioned off to obtain "fair market value." As land prices along the shoreline soar, so does the fair market value, making noncommercial uses infeasible. On San Francisco Bay, for example, Hamilton Air Force Base was sold to a local developer for housing and commercial development.

Even lands already bequeathed for recreational uses are not safe. The military legitimately reserves the right to revoke agreements should national security dictate. However, as the case of White Point in Los Angeles so ominously demonstrates, national security can be unexpectedly summoned. White Point is a 145-acre former military base located on the Palos Verdes Peninsula in the midst of the southern California megalopolis. The site is one of the few remaining urban open spaces on the southern California shoreline that is geologically stable enough to support large-scale recreational use. After deactivating the facility, the Department of Interior under the Carter administration deeded the upland 115 acres to the city of Los Angeles for recreational purposes—with the stipulation that the property could be reclaimed if needed for national defense. The beach portion of the base was then deeded to Los Angeles County and is now open to the public. Later, the Department of Parks and Recreation and the State Coastal Conservancy studied the possibility of establishing a state park on the beach and uplands. They concluded that a state park would "provide a high-quality active recreation experience, protect a vitally needed coastal urban open space, and preserve its natural and cultural resources for future generations."

Meanwhile, in March 1984, the Department of Defense took the first steps

to reclaim the property for military use. The Air Force announced that, "in the interest of national defense," fifty acres of White Point were needed for officer housing. According to State Parks, the Air Force project "would seriously degrade the resource and open space values and would effectively eliminate the department's ability to develop a park of statewide significance." The Air Force is seeking approval from the Coastal Commission, whose staff is recommending against the project.

Although housing is expensive in Los Angeles, there are many alternative sites for military housing but very few alternative sites for waterfront recreation. The repossession of White Point may or may not be consistent with California's coastal plan, but it is clearly at odds with the noble tradition of reusing military facilities for the highest and best public use. It is ironic as well as troubling that an obsolete coastal defense facility may house officers of the space division of the Los Angeles Air Force Station. The "star warriors" might get ocean views. □



Donald B. Neuwirth

Swords Into Playgrounds

WHO OWNS MANY of the most attractive waterfront sites in the United States? The military—yet until now one did not have to enlist to enjoy them. The military presence has often protected and opened the waterfront far better than private owners would have; historically, the armed forces have excelled not only in their choice of sites but also in the management of natural resources and the accommodation of public access. And, as coastal bases have become obsolete, some of them have converted entirely to recreational facilities.

Today, with outer space as our new defense arena, one might hope that more coastal bases would be deactivated and converted to recreational centers. However, new national policies may preclude public use of surplus military lands and reverse the magnificent tradition of military stewardship of the waterfront.

The armed forces were led to the waterfront by a unique congruence of strategy and scenery. Coastal landforms provided symbolic and functional locations for changing military purposes. At harbor entrances, artillery forts with overlapping cannon trajectories evolved into Nike bases to intercept incoming missiles. Bluffs and points first served as lighthouse stations, then as lookouts for submarines and spy landings. As these military facilities became obsolete, a powerful combination of concerned citizens, legislators, and park managers worked with a cooperative military to create monumental urban waterfront parks such as the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, composed of six former army forts on both sides of the entrance to San Francisco Bay.

The military developed and maintained its facilities with enough care and

sensitivity that conversion to public use has been relatively easy. How many privately developed sites could become parks without massive restoration? Not only has the military left eighteenth-century forts and other historic treasures, but it has protected beaches, rare and endangered species, and scenic vistas during active military use. Even “hard-edged” industrial facilities such as Floyd Bennett Air Field in New York City and the embarkation piers at Fort Mason in San Francisco have been converted into ecological and cultural centers.

The public can also enjoy facilities still being used actively by the military. Fishermen, surfers, campers, and dune-buggy drivers use military facilities from Camp Pendleton to the Humboldt Bay Coast Guard Station. Under various legislative mandates, bases must be opened to the public to the maximum extent consistent with defense needs. Unneeded land on bases is often managed by the National Park Service or by local government for recreational use. For example, to be consistent with California’s coastal plan, the space shuttle project at Vandenberg Air Force Base recently provided five miles of beachfront to the public.

Military bases on the waterfront also provide some of the most important open spaces in urban areas. The Naval Postgraduate School manages virtually the last pristine dune field on Monterey Bay. Any new construction proposed in the San Francisco Presidio is reviewed by the National Park Service to maintain the scenic value of the area. The dunes at Fort Ord are a beautiful panorama from Highway One even if they are full of spent cartridges.

However, recent changes in policy may upset the delicate balance of Congressional intent, citizen pressure,

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1330 Broadway, Suite 1100
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