

San Pedro Bay Historical Society Newsletter

SUMMER 2020

JULY

Staying Safe

It's been hard to witness the damage that the Covid-19 virus has inflicted locally and elsewhere. As for the SPBHS, things have been in a holding pattern since the virus brought activities to a halt in mid-March. Adhering closely to the the Los Angeles County Department of Health requirements, we cannot yet welcome visitors to the Muller House Museum or the Archives. The Municipal Building, where the Archives are located, also currently restricts entry to almost all the offices housed there. We miss seeing our members and friends and hope you have been able to manage during this prolonged, difficult time.

New Paint & Other Projects

There should be a version of that phrase, "Rust never sleeps," to describe how quickly painted exteriors weather in our sunny, salty coastal air. Being harbor adjacent, the siding and trim of the Muller House Museum have weathered to the point that touch-ups are insufficient. It's time for a complete repaint. Bids are now being taken, and donations for this costly project are most welcome.

While the usual activities are on hold, this is a good time to tackle additional projects that can be done individually or remotely: We'd like to refurbish the landscaping around the Muller House Museum eventually and renew some of the lattice features in the patio area. Efforts to identify drought tolerant plants suitable for a Victorian period house are at the discussion stage, and bids for fixes to the sprinkler system are being sought. House curtains will get a washing and new ones made for the workroom. If anyone is handy with a crochet hook to create roller shade pulls or can contribute other talents and energy, please contact us at sanpedrohistory@gmail.com.

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John Smith hoists the flag on the morning of July 4th

To Renew Your Membership

Without the opportunity to hold the usual fundraisers and summer events, more than ever each membership renewal, new membership, and donation is deeply appreciated. Thank you to all who have continued their support!

* Problems continue with renewal envelopes being returned to the sender's own address instead of reaching the SPBHS post office box. When mailing your renewal, please do the following: If there is a bar code (a series of small vertical lines) at the bottom of the envelope on either side, line it out. And if after you mail the envelope it shows up again, make sure that any bar code is crossed out before re-mailing. We prefer that you not put a return address on the envelope, but if you do, please use the Society's address, P.O. Box 1568, San Pedro, CA 90733-1568. An envelope redesign is in the works.

A Raft of Developments Headed This Way

The new seven-story apartment block of 375 units at 550 S. Palos Verdes Street is impossible to miss. It's simply huge. A second big box development may land right across the street, opposite the entrance to the Municipal Building. And there's more! Clustering in the downtown area and along the commercial corridor of Pacific Avenue, at least eleven other developments are waiting in the wings,

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San Pedro Chautauquas

by Sandy Cardot

If you were to describe the San Pedro of 1917 through 1924, which of the following words would you use: cultured, educated, refined, religious or perhaps bawdy, risqué, uncouth and wild? What have you heard about our town and its past history? Possibly all these adjectives could be used as we attempt to paint a word picture of our town during its early days. For now, let's concentrate on the first group – cultured, educated, refined, and religious.

During the early years of the twentieth century, few people had radios, autos, and certainly not T.V. Movies were in their infancy. They lacked sound and were usually a short one or two reels. Then in 1906, Long Beach, California, became the site of an early Chautauqua, held for thirteen days of July in the "new auditorium," described by the *San Pedro Daily News* as "the largest on the Pacific Coast." For the price of \$2.50 per season, music lovers in the area could hear performances by Signor Russio, billed as a leading soloist, and by the (apparently) popular Long Beach Italian Band. The cultured and refined citizens of Long Beach could also enjoy offerings by speakers and perhaps even a dance troupe.

Even as early as 1906, there just might have been a bit of friendly rivalry between the "towns" (note that word for later reference) of Long Beach and San Pedro. It is not surprising that, a few years later, San Pedro had visits, usually in the month of May, from their own Chautauquas. At that time, San Pedro couldn't boast of having any auditoriums appropriate for Chautauqua performances; San Pedro's Chautauquas were of the "traveling tent show" variety.

From 1917 until 1924, San Pedrans were treated to from one to three weeks of speeches, musical, dance troupe, and theater performances, religious talks by "famous pastors," and even operas. The performance tents were open daily during the entire visit of the traveling Chautauqua, and the cost for the entire season ranged from \$2.50 to \$3.00 per season ticket. On May 5, 1921, the *San Pedro Daily Pilot* commented: "Next Monday will be the first day of the biggest week of San Pedro's annual

calendar—a week crowded with worthwhile pleasure for the hundreds of men, women, and children who are taking advantage of the Ellison-White Chautauqua which is sponsored by some of the foremost people of the Pacific Coast and offers talent of national fame."

In the same article, the author noted that the daily program for the 1921 season would include "something gratifying to every taste and inclination. The music for each day will be a rare treat in itself, but the biggest attraction to a large number of people will be the speakers of national and international note . . ." He went on to describe those speakers: "A famous correspondent and author of two current 'best sellers,' a community singing director with a great war record, an Australian soldier, poet and traveler whose war experiences were not conducive to song, a scientist and electrical inventor, a world famous arctic explorer, an artist who paints pictures of beauty and restfulness in the arrangement of furniture and color schemes in interior decoration, an athletic expert and an authority on the weeds and flowers of literature, are what this year's Chautauqua has to offer in the way of speakers."

The Chautauquas continued to appear each summer in San Pedro until 1924. Apparently, the good people of San Pedro, who now had autos, radios, movies and other forms of entertainment, lost interest in the Chautauqua tent shows. There had been worries among the local sponsors in 1923 that the Chautauqua would not return the following year due to shortage of funds. However, there was one more season in 1924. A short article that appeared in the *Daily Pilot* of May 17 sounded more like an obituary than a fond farewell to the Chautauquas: "The Chautauqua is a very creditable institution which has brought much clean, bright entertainment to many small-town communities which, but for it, they would have been deprived.



Dr. Turner Talks Entertainingly of Governmental Wastes and Community Progress and Urges Unity in the Consolidation of All Civic Betterment.

In a city it has no more use than a fifth wheel on a wagon. And it is good to know that San Pedro is indicated in the city class, where it has long belonged . . . In a busy city with half a dozen theatres, more places to find entertainment every night than could be taken in during a week and with the variety afforded in a city . . . no field for the Chautauqua has existed here for several years.”

So, small-town San Pedro grew into San Pedro, the city. Farewell to small-town life, with its Chautauquas and other small-town pleasures. Hello, 1925! Let’s turn off the radio, hop in our automobile, and take in a movie downtown.



The original Chautauqua Institution was founded in western New York on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in 1874 for the purpose of teaching Methodist Sunday School teachers. The Institution (it continues to have that name today) grew over the years, and remains a center dedicated to music, literature, education, and religion. I grew up in the Chautauqua area in a village (as small towns in the area are still called) named Bemus Point, located on Chautauqua Lake, a few miles from “The Institution.”

Unlike the traveling Chautauquas which visited San Pedro in the early twentieth century, Chautauqua Institution is, and has always been, a very permanent community, with its own post office, library, bookstore, amphitheater, performance theaters, and lovely hotels and private homes. The “Chautauqua Season” runs from the last week in June through the last week in August—every year until this year of 2020, when the summer program was canceled due to the pandemic.

The traveling Chautauquas brought programs of “culture and refinement” to small towns throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and new Zealand during the early years of the twentieth century. Usually they were locally sponsored and funded, with programs set up, not by the original Chautauqua Institution, but by agents such as Ellison-White, who brought many of the Chautauquas to West Coast towns and villages.

Editor’s Note: Sandy Cardot is a retired educator, a member of SPBHS, and regularly volunteers at the Archives. I’d like to thank her for this lively look at San Pedro history. Do you have a San Pedro story to contribute? Please contact: sanpedrohistory@gmail.com.

In the 1930s, the *News-Pilot* sponsored “kitchen Chautauquas,” often held at the Knights of Columbus Hall, to showcase cookery and new products.

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not including the adaptive reuse of Harbor View House (the old YMCA) and the increased units being fitted into the existing acreage of the eventual Rancho San Pedro redevelopment.

By including a small, and some would say inadequate, number of low-income units or by meeting other criteria, developers win approval of variances on height, square footage, set-backs, and other measures. Buildout can be maximized through so-called “density bonuses,” which policies at various levels of government allow in order to promote more housing.

In practical terms, the cumulative impact of these developments is of concern. Think of safety, traffic, noise, pollution, and parking, both in Pacific Avenue adjacent neighborhoods and in the downtown area. Of equal concern is whether these developments stray from the San Pedro Community Plan, a document that reflects community input. Let’s look at the vision statement embedded in the Plan: “San Pedro is a stable community that provides a high quality of life for its residents—one that builds upon its distinct natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and proximity to the Port and waterfront, while retaining the community’s small town feel for multiple generations of San Pedrans.” Certainly that small-town feel is about to change, while the natural beauty will be obscured. Throughout much of the Community Plan, sensitive development is called for, such as the protection of residential areas by transitioning the scale and massing of new buildings; good pedestrian and vehicular access, including parking; provision for retail, especially along the Pacific Avenue corridor; and preserving the character of San Pedro.

That “Pedro pride” one hears about comes not only from our ties to one another but from the connections we feel to the visible geography and the streetscape that still remains intact. Destroying older buildings, obliterating views, both to the hills and the harbor, will diminish the uniqueness of this place. The Community Plan becomes only so much print on paper if fortress-like buildings are allowed to dwarf neighborhoods and downtown developments make access to the historic core nearly impossible for those who do not already live there.



Seen at the Pacific Diner

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Dedicated to preserving historical buildings and the uniquely heterogenous nature of the San Pedro Bay community, SPBHS board members are not silent. We speak up at development hearings and at neighborhood councils; we write letters to city officials and LA City Planning, and one of our members is on the Vinegar Hill Historic Preservation Overlay Zone Board. Still, many more voices are needed if residents are to help shape the way development unfolds in San Pedro. Can you get involved?

For the Community Plan and its overlays, visit <https://planning.lacity.org/plans-policies/community-plan-area/san-pedro>. The dramatic scope of the proposed developments can be seen at the website Urbanize LA: <https://urbanize.la/neighborhood/san>. To receive City Planning news, sign up at <https://planning.lacity.org/about/email-sign-up>.

Recently Completed

24 units – 8th and Centre Sts.

375 units – 550 South Palos Verdes St.

Mona Dallas Reddick: Writing, Editing, Graphics & Production
Sandy Cardot: Feature Story
Diner Sign Photo: Toni Martinovich
Mailing Team: Mary Jo Walker, John Mattson
Printing: Priority One, San Pedro

Proposed Projects

281 units – 625 S. Beacon St.

100 units – 921 S. Beacon, Harbor View House Adaptive Reuse Project, now underway

300 units – 505 S. Centre (old Court House property)

137 units – 511 S. Harbor Blvd.

80 rooms – 544 S. Pacific Ave., hotel

101 units – 2100 block S. Pacific Ave.

109 units – 1300 block S. Pacific Ave.

99 units – 444 5th St.

32 units – 336-350 7th St.

56 units – 420 9th St.

91 units – 456 W. 9th St.

Outside Downtown and Pacific Ave. Corridor

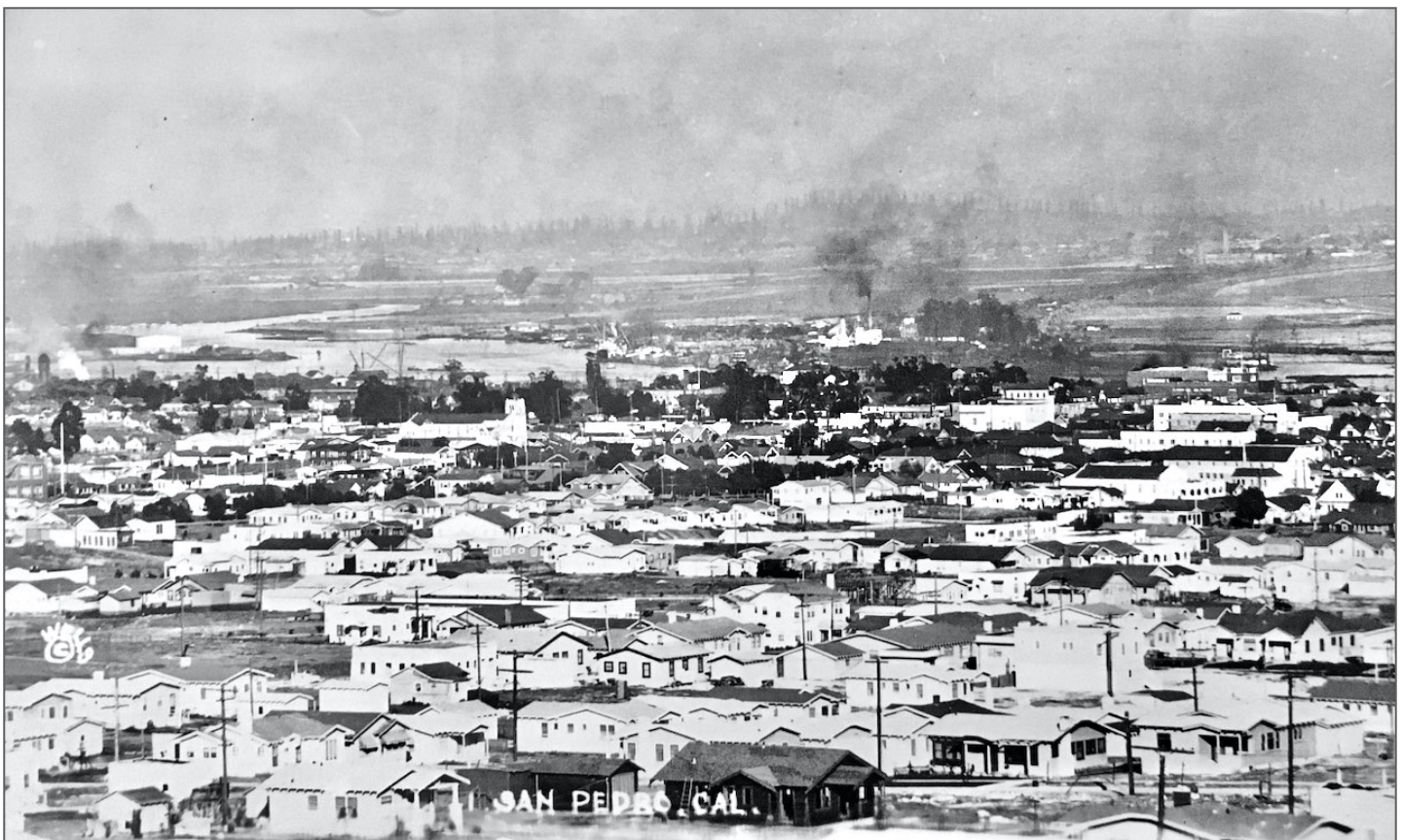
120 units – 120 N. Harbor Blvd.

63 units – 407 N. Harbor Blvd. 1,626 units

1,626 units – Rancho San Pedro redevelopment, between 1st & 3rd Sts. and Beacon & Mesa Sts.

676 detached homes, townhomes, and flats – 26900 S. Western Ave. Ponte Vista residential development

Note: Project information is derived from available online sources. Project scope may vary after approvals or final construction. Many articles on historic preservation are available online. One of relevance to San Pedro is at Bloomberg CityLab: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-08/why-historic-preservation-needs-a-new-approach>



Post-WW I housing boom in San Pedro spread small frame houses west and south. To the east, across the Main Channel, a forest of oil derricks line the horizon. Postcard from collection of editor.