

# Laguna Beach Historical Society

Murphy-Smith Bungalow  
278 Ocean Avenue  
Laguna Beach CA 92651



# Laguna Life

The Laguna Beach Historical Society Newsletter: April 2008

**Please attend Historical Society Program to be held at  
Laguna Beach City Hall Council Chambers, 505 Forest Avenue Monday April 21st – 7:30 P.M.**

**Vern Spitaleri “The History of Main Beach Park” Celebrate 40th Year Window-to-the-Sea Anniversary**

The next The Laguna Beach Historical Society program will be held at the Laguna Beach City Hall Council Chambers, Monday, April 21st at 7:30 P.M. “The History of Main Beach Park” will be presented by former Main Beach Committee Member and current Laguna Beach Historical Society Board Member Vern Spitaleri. The 1972 Main Beach Committee was comprised of William M. Wilcoxon, Merrill Johnson, Vernon Blackman, Harry Lawrence, and Vernon Spitaleri.

1998 was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary when the City Council burnt the bonds issued to finance the purchase of the Main Beach’s 1,000 foot long oceanfront. So 2008 is the 40<sup>th</sup> year anniversary.

On June 22, 1974 the City dedicated the Park and “*The Chronicle of Laguna's Window-to-the-Sea*” in the program that day included:

- 1956 First bond election to purchase Main Beach Park fails with 65% affirmative vote (66-2/3 required).
- 1960 Second bond election fails by less than one percent of required 66-2/3%.
- 1968 First bond issue by the Corporation and purchase of most of the Park for the City.
- 1972 Third Main Beach Park Committee recommends development as beach park with minimum commercial activity.
- 1973 Festival of Arts makes long-term financial commitment to Main Beach Park.



## Laguna Beach Historical Society Board of Directors

**Kimberly Stuart – President, Anne Frank - Vice President, Nelda Stone – Secretary, Gene Felder – Treasurer, Francie Holder, John Hoover, Jane Janz, Eric Jessen, Ronald Kaufman, Glenna Matthews, Ed Perry, Tom Simpson, Vern Spitaleri, Georgina Valdez, Victoria Winters**

For those having treasured historic photographs or printed material, the Historical Society is happy to scan them electronically and return them to the owners. This way there will be a record preserved for future generations without the necessity for the owners to relinquish the item.

### History of Main Beach Park, Laguna Beach's Window-to-the-Sea

“On Oct. 29, 1968, a Laguna dream that had spanned more than three decades became true. The city became the new owner of 1,000 feet of main Beach property stretching from the Hotel Laguna through the Boys Club and the vision of a publically owned Main Beach Park for the first time came within the realm of reality”

#### 1920s Before Hotel Laguna Built



#### Life Guard Tower on Main Beach 2008



### Historic Photos from Tom Pulley Postcard Collection

#### Hotel Next to Life Guard Stand

#### 2008 Laguna's Window to the Sea



The Main Beach Park bonds were paid for from Festival of Arts increased rent payments to the City for the use of Irvine Bowl Park. Main Beach Park was dedicated June 22 1974. “Ceremonies began at 8 a.m. and continued for more than 12 hours ending with a fireworks display. Roy Holm, then mayor, and some of his friends livened up the festivities by parachuting onto Main Beach from a plane piloted by astronaut Gordon Cooper.” “The 30-year bonds were paid off with revenue from the lease payments by the Festival of Arts. A bond-burning ceremony was held Oct. 1, 1998.”

## From a Main Beach Committee Report

“proposals for hotel development continued during 1968. A feasibility study was done by the William J. Moran Company, dated March 18, 1968. This proposal contemplated ‘an integrated complex consisting of a multi-story parking structure (600 cars), a service station, convention center facilities, shops, a multi-story hotel, boardwalk, and sea wall (rendered necessary to protect the other structures).”

“Bernard Syfan ... proposal, dated March 3, 1968, contemplated a 50 foot high motel structure on the parcel, and showed underground parking extending into Heisler Park with a public patio above and with a driveway in place of the present pedestrian walkway.



**Homes on the Boardwalk**  
Main Beach uses included Richfield  
Gas Station, Cabrillo Dancing



**Main Beach Park 2008 looking North**  
Photo includes Texaco and Oldsmobile signs



**Make Suggestions for Historical Society Future Programs**  
See info at [www.LagunaHistory.org](http://www.LagunaHistory.org)

## From a Main Beach Committee Report

“The committee was appointed by the City Council in December, 1970” ...History – “Acquisition by the public of Laguna’s main Beach in 1968 was the largest single financial transaction in the history of Laguna Beach. We believe that the community felt that such acquisition was vital to the future of Laguna Beach, not only to insure park development, but also to upgrade the entire downtown area, to reserve the pattern of uses that had been allowed to exist on this property during the recent past, and to achieve the aesthetic image on the Main Beach that Laguna has been so successful in achieving in other areas.”

“Public acquisition has been discussed since before the incorporation of the town in 1927.”

“Bond issues for the purchase for park purposes of the 1,000 feet from the Boys Club to the Hotel Laguna were submitted to voters in 1955 and in 1959 and both times received a majority of favorable votes, but fell just short of the required two-thirds.”

“Part of the impetus for these bond issues was the threat of large commercial structures, of either an apartment or hotel nature, on the property. In 1958, a proposal for such use was approved under a variance procedure by the Planning Commission. But this decision was reversed by the City Council after public outcry.”

**Thanks to Historical Society Business / Organization Members** Andrus Plumbing Borthwick  
Guy Bettenhausen Butler Box & Stake Charles’ Wig Chateau...Exchange Club of Laguna Beach Laguna Beach  
Visitors & Conference Bureau...LBHS Artists Class of "63" MacGillivray Freeman Films Realtor Monica Mukai  
Reynolds Carpet Service Stewarts Landscaping ...Village Laguna

## President’s Message by Kimberly Stuart

The mission of the Laguna Beach Historical Society is to preserve the heritage of Laguna Beach and to disseminate information about the history of Laguna Beach. On Monday, April 21st we sponsor History of Main Beach Park by former Main Beach Committee Member and Laguna Beach Historical Society Board Member Vern Spitaleri. In 1968, the City bought the land, so 2008 is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Main Beach Park.

Then on Monday, June 2nd, "The Train Robber's Daughter" by Jay O'Connell about Laguna Beach resident Eva Evans who was the daughter of Evans and the fiancée of Sontag, famous train robbers in the San Joaquin Valley. Both programs will be at the Laguna Beach City Council Chambers at 505 Forest Avenue and are from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. The public is invited and there is no charge.

The Board of the Laguna Beach Historical Society has some new additional members. We welcome Francie Holder, Ronald Kaufman, and Tom Simpson. We thank the Wells Fargo Bank for extending our lease at the Murphy-Smith Bungalow until December 31, 2010. We have been working to refurbish needed repairs and are thankful for the services of hardworking Ken Nickel.

The Laguna Beach Historical Society has been most fortunate to be able to scan in hundreds of images from the Tom Pulley Postcard Collection. Unless, otherwise noted the historic photos are from the Tom Pulley Postcard Collection

Do step back into 1920s Laguna visiting the Murphy-Smith house at 278 Ocean Avenue, however, it is open to the public at no charge most every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. We need more volunteers to achieve the board’s top priority to ensure that the house is open to be enjoyed and experienced by members and the public. If interested, call Gene Felder at 939-7257.

To view photos and more information see our web site at [www.LagunaHistory.org](http://www.LagunaHistory.org).

**2008 Dues now due, send \$15 per person, \$25 per household or \$50 per business or organization to  
Laguna Beach Historical Society, 278 Ocean Avenue, Laguna Beach CA 92651**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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