

Originally Pacific Beach

Looking Back at the Heritage
of a Unique Community

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Acknowledgements

Most of the information about the Pacific Beach past which appears in this book was derived from original source material; contemporary newspapers and other periodicals, city directories, maps, public records and photographs. Local newspapers on microfilm dating to the 1860s are available in the California Room at the San Diego Central Library and the Geisel Library at the University of California, San Diego. These libraries also hold original copies of other early periodicals and city directories, as well as special collections relating to San Diego history. Microfilm records of property transfers going back to 1846 and other official records and maps can be viewed in the Office of the San Diego County Recorder at the San Diego County Administration Center.

The research library at the San Diego History Center also has many of these resources as well as other archives including transcripts of Superior Court cases, articles of incorporation, marriage certificates, maps and Lot Books, the ledgers in which the ownership and assessed valuation of each lot in San Diego subdivisions was recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thanks to Jane Kenealy, Lauren Rasmussen and Muriel Strickland for their knowledge and assistance identifying and interpreting these resources. Thanks also to Chris Travers and Carol Myers for their help with the History Center's extensive collection of historical photographs.

1 The Pacific Beach Company

E. S. Babcock and H. L. Story had already found success platting land into additions when they developed Coronado in 1886 on previously empty beachfront land on the far side of San Diego Bay. Another group of San Diego developers was determined to replicate Babcock and Story's success with a different empty beachfront area, this time on the far side of False Bay. On July 28, 1887, the Pacific Beach Company was incorporated under the laws of the State of California to 'purchase, sell, lease, and mortgage lands and otherwise conduct a general business in real estate' as well as 'laying off town sites, laying out and improving streets and roads thereon, building, furnishing and conducting hotels and restaurants' and 'to aid and assist in the construction and maintenance of colleges, schools, railroads, wagon roads, telegraph and telephone lines' [2].

The initial directors and stockholders of the Pacific Beach Company were R. A., J. R. and W. W. Thomas, O. S. Hubbell, D. C. Reed, D. P. Hale, Thomas Metcalf, Charles Collins and George Hensley. Other local businessmen and land developers including Charles Pauly, A. G. Gassen and O. J. Stough became involved with the company in subsequent years. These men had already made fortunes in banking and real estate and were well established in San Diego business circles³.

The July 31 *San Diego Union* announced the incorporation of the Pacific Beach Company under the headline 'A GREAT ENTERPRISE, A New City About to be Built at False Bay, BY A SYNDICATE OF MILLIONAIRES'. The *Union* article reported that the company was

³ The Thomases were founders of the First National Bank of San Diego. Hubbell was a director of the First National Bank as well as the California Southern Railroad, and part owner of the San Diego Gas and Electric Light Company. Hensley was in the property abstract business and an owner of downtown property. Reed had also begun in the abstract business and had been a principal in other subdivisions in the San Diego area, including, with Hubbell, the Reed and Hubbell addition on the bay between San Diego and National City. Gassen, a San Diego pioneer and the colorful City Marshall from 1872 to 1875, was a major landowner in Pacific Beach, Rose Canyon and Mt. Soledad, and was involved with Hubbell, Hale and Hensley in the San Diego and Pacific Beach Railroad. Pauly was a real estate promoter who had subdivided Pauly's Addition in North Park. Gassen and Pauly jointly built the Gassen - Pauly Block, which still stands at the corner of Fourth and E Streets in San Diego's Gaslamp District (the bricks are said to have come from Gassen's brickyard in Rose Canyon [716]). Stough had been a founder of a village in the Chicago area (Hinsdale) before moving to San Diego in 1888 [731].

allied with the San Diego and Pacific Beach Railroad, incorporated a few days before, and that 'behind the two corporations, and going hand in hand, so to speak, is a College Company'. In addition to the information contained in the articles of incorporation, the *Union* claimed to have ascertained the magnitude of the undertaking by conversation with the incorporators. They learned from one of the gentlemen that the syndicate had obtained by purchase 1,665 acres of land fronting on False Bay for the purpose of laying out a town, and 'will christen the place Pacific Beach' [3].

In October 1887 H. K. Wheeler, City Engineer, drew up a subdivision map in which the entire area from the ocean to Rose Creek and from the southern tips of Crown Point and Mission Beach to the Mt. Soledad foothills was divided into rectangular blocks by a grid of north-south streets and east-west avenues. The streets and avenues were all 80 feet wide except for Broadway (now Ingraham Street), the main north-south street, which was 100 feet wide and Grand Avenue, the main east-west avenue, which was 125 feet wide. Each block was 270 feet north-to-south and 500 feet east-to-west and was further subdivided into 40 lots; 20 lots 25 feet wide and 125 feet deep lining the avenue on either side of the block with a 20-foot-wide alley behind each lot connecting the streets at each end.

The streets were numbered, beginning with First Street near the beach to Seventeenth Street near Rose Creek, plus Broadway, which was between Eighth and Ninth. North of Grand Avenue, the avenues were all named for states, with the exception of College (now Garnet) Avenue. South of Grand the avenues were named for officials or associates of the Pacific Beach Company; Thomas, Reed, Gassen, **Hubbell**, Hensley, Platt, Metcalf, Hale, Collins and Poiser (except at the tip of Crown Point, and Mission Beach, where the avenues were named for trees).

The Wheeler subdivision map of October 1887 included a few notable exceptions to the regular grid pattern created by the intersecting streets and avenues. A four-block area in the center of the subdivision, extending north from College to Vermont Avenue (now Emerald Street) and between Ninth and Eleventh (now Jewell and Lamont) Streets, was not subdivided and was designated as the College Campus. Grand Avenue was extraordinarily wide because it was meant to accommodate the right-of-way of a steam railway from San Diego to a depot at the beach near the foot of Grand, which itself was allocated several blocks of land. Grand Avenue (and the railroad right-of-way) followed the same east-west alignment as the other avenues between the beach and Eleventh Street but east of there it turned and sliced through several of the regular rectangular blocks to

authorize in any manner, directly or indirectly, said premises or any part thereof to be used for the purpose of vending intoxicating liquors for drinking purposes, whether said vending shall be directly or under some evasive guise, thereupon the title hereby granted shall revert to and be vested in the Pacific Beach Company, a corporation, its successors and assigns, and it, or said successors or assigns, shall be entitled to the immediate possession thereof, provided that any bona fide mortgager of said premises, in case the foregoing covenant be broken, shall have the option to at once claim and enforce the foregoing reversion for himself and for his own use and benefit, subject, however, to the foregoing covenant running against any further violation thereof, otherwise the foregoing covenant shall have the same force and effect as if said proviso was not herein inserted. In the dedication of the streets and alleys in said town to public use, there is hereby reserved from such use the right to vend or otherwise dispose of intoxicating liquors for drinking purposes, and to that extent said streets are and hereby and forever shall remain the private property of said grantors and their assigns.

Altogether, a visual scan through the grantor index of the Deed Books found entries for 134 deeds covering 991 lots worth \$138,000 granted by the Pacific Beach Company up to 1892; 61 deeds for 586 lots worth \$80,631 recorded in 1888, 53 deeds for 284 lots worth \$42,303 in 1889, 21 deeds and 121 lots worth \$14,993 in 1890 and 1891⁵. The lot and block numbers recorded in these deeds generally match the marked-out lots on the Wheeler map at the History Center, supporting the theory that the map was used to keep track of sales.

A substantial amount of property was granted by the Pacific Beach Company at little or no cost, at least as recorded on the deeds. Three deeds for a total of 189 lots were granted to the San Diego College Company for \$1 each, in addition to the grant of the entire four-block College Campus, also for a consideration of \$1. The Board of Education was granted two deeds for 8 lots each, also for \$1. The trustees of the Pacific Beach Presbyterian Church were granted 4 lots for \$1. Another deed for 24 lots in Pacific Beach (and a tract of land beyond the eastern edge of the subdivision) was granted for no consideration other than the grantees were required to build and operate an asbestos manufacturing enterprise.

Many of the lots were sold to associates of the Pacific Beach Company or their families, including Charles Collins (40), D. C. Reed (18), J. R., R. A. and Mary A. Thomas (14), Thomas and G. B. Metcalf (8), Clifford and Kate G. Hubbell (6), and George Hensley (9). Frances A. Thomas, presumably a relative of company manager J. R. Thomas,

⁵ Like the deeds themselves, index entries were entered in cursive script that was not always clear and are not in strict alphabetical order; Pacific Beach Company deeds appear along with other grantors beginning with 'Pa' in roughly the order they were recorded. Consequently some deeds may have been overlooked in this search.

and Alice Gassen, wife of A. G. Gassen, each bought two entire blocks. Other buyers, including Rev. L. Groh, Madge Morris Wagner and Rose Hartwick Thorpe, were associated with the college, which was under construction as lots were being sold. H. K. Wheeler, the City Engineer who had laid out the subdivision map of Pacific Beach, paid \$750 for 3 of its lots. Lots even became wedding gifts; the February 19, 1888, *Union* carried a notice for the marriage of Frank Colwell and Carrie Lewis and noted that the bride received many valuable presents, 'among them a square of 10 lots in Pacific Beach' [12].

Assuming that the dollar amounts recorded in the grant deeds reflected the price paid by buyers, and not counting the lots transferred for token amounts, the average price per lot in Pacific Beach between 1888 and 1891 was about \$180. Property near the beach and the railroad depot or near the center of the subdivision averaged \$300 - \$400. Lots on the fringes of the community were less, as little as \$40 - \$50. Corner lots were priced at a 25% premium to ordinary lots [13] and discounts were applied to purchases of multiple lots. Despite the threat to 'advance prices' starting January 1, 1888, the average price per lot recorded in deeds actually went down in the first years; \$210 in 1888, \$170 in 1889 and \$125 in 1890-1891 (again not counting deeds granted for little or no consideration).

The total paid for all lots recorded in the Deed Books between 1888 and 1891, including lots purchased by company insiders, was far less than the \$200,000 figure the *San Diego Union* claimed for the first day of sales alone. Actually the *Union's* report had stated that 'over \$200,000 worth of lots had been disposed of'. It is possible that some buyers committed to purchase a lot during the opening sale and were counted toward the total worth of lots disposed of but then defaulted on subsequent payments and never received a deed. If so, and if the value of lots granted for token payments is included, the total worth of lots disposed of during this period could have approached \$200,000, although over a period of 4 years and not after just the first day of sales.

San Diego's Great Boom came to an end in early 1888, just a few months after the Pacific Beach Company's lots had gone on sale, and with it the abrupt departure of a large percentage of the population and a sharp downturn in the real estate market. In Pacific Beach, the college had opened to great fanfare in time for the 1888 fall semester, but was unable to sustain the momentum and closed after the 1890-1891 academic year. The asbestos works apparently ceased operations in 1892 and had disappeared by 1894. Monteith's Directory of San Diego and Vicinity for 1889-1890 had listed a total of 37 residences in Pacific Beach along with the occupation of the resident [14]. Eleven of

2 The College

Harr Wagner was an 1881 graduate of Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, who had been inspired by Joaquin Miller's 'Songs of the Sierras' to relocate to San Francisco [28]. In 1882 he purchased *The Golden Era*, a literary magazine that had been published in San Francisco since 1852 and in its early years had featured contributors such as Mark Twain and Bret Harte. In 1887 Wagner moved the magazine to San Diego, offering 'a rather abrupt notice to our subscribers' that San Diego was destined to become a great city and that *The Golden Era* was determined to contribute to the city's growth and earn a share of the benefits [29]. He credited A. H. Isham, then of the firm of Truman, Isham and Hooker, of San Francisco, for 'originating the idea and the plan' for the move, and thanked a long list of prominent San Diegans who had committed to subscriptions. Apparently Isham had also arranged a \$5,000 payment to Wagner to settle his debts and cover moving expenses [30].

Wagner wrote an editorial in the May 1887 *Golden Era* outlining the benefits of an institution of learning to a town and suggesting that there was room for a college in San Diego, 'not a small insignificant institute, but an institution that will compare favorably with the noted colleges of America' and that the city was the right size to support such an institution [31]. The June issue referred to 'the new college, to be located in or near San Diego, with Dr. Samuel Sprecher as president' [32].

On August 16, 1887, Wagner, C. S. Sprecher, F. P. Davidson, O. S. Hubbell and T. S. Van Dyke incorporated The San Diego College Company in San Diego to 'erect and construct buildings to be used for colleges, universities, and in connection therewith; to carry on, control and maintain colleges and universities; to buy, sell, mortgage and lease lands'. Wagner, Sprecher and Davidson split 99.5% of the shares, while Hubbell and Van Dyke each owned 0.25% [33].

Rev. Cecil S. Sprecher was a graduate of Wittenberg and had been a Lutheran minister in Ohio, a Presbyterian minister in Stockton and pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles [34]. He was the son of Samuel Sprecher, D.D., LL.D., who had served as the second president of Wittenberg College from 1849 to 1874 and played an important role in establishing it as a successful educational institution (Wittenberg University still exists in Springfield).

Frank P. Davidson was married to Samuel Sprecher's daughter (and C. S. Sprecher's sister) Eleanor or Ella. He had also attended Wittenberg College where he received an A.B. degree in 1875 and an A.M. in 1878. Davidson had been principal of a ward school in Springfield, an assistant instructor at the Wittenberg preparatory school and instructor of natural sciences at the Springfield high school before moving to San Diego in 1888 to play his part in establishing the San Diego College [35].

The three principal directors of the college were graduates of Wittenberg College and presumably saw Wittenberg as a model for the institution they hoped to create (although Wittenberg was and remains affiliated with the Lutheran Church while their college was to be non-sectarian). Sprecher and Davidson's family relationship with Samuel Sprecher undoubtedly inspired their plan to recruit him to lead their new college and repeat the success he had brought to their alma mater.

The college company's plan to 'buy, sell, mortgage and lease lands' would have sounded like a promising business model at the height of the Great Boom in San Diego, and was complemented by one of the Pacific Beach Company's stated purposes, 'to aid and assist in the construction and maintenance of colleges, schools, railroads, wagon roads, telegraph and telephone lines by the donation of lands, money or any other lawful means' [2]. An article in the November 1887 *Golden Era* explained that in the latter part of August the writer, presumably Harr Wagner, had been standing in the real estate office of A. W. Jewell looking for land suitable for the college when O. S. Hubbell happened by, was called in, and negotiations began which resulted in the location of the college in Pacific Beach (Hubbell was a founding director of the Pacific Beach Company and the San Diego and Pacific Beach Railway, both incorporated in July 1887, as well as the college company, incorporated in August) [36].

The September 4 *San Diego Union* reported that the enterprise was fostered by the originators of the Pacific Beach Company and was to be built at a beautiful site on the shores of False Bay, 'a picture that needs no colors to make it attractive'. Reid Bros., the architects of the Hotel Del Coronado, had completed the plans which consisted of a dormitory for gentlemen, one for ladies, a musical conservatory and a four-story central building containing the Lecture Hall, Museum, Art Hall, Laboratory, Literary Halls and Recitation Rooms. The buildings would form one of the most attractive places in San Diego and would be enclosed in a ten-acre park, and no college in the Pacific States and Territories would have the working facilities of the San Diego College.

Samuel Sprecher, D.D., LL.D. would be the head of the institution, Davidson would have charge of the department of natural sciences and

3 The Railroad

Although in many ways Pacific Beach was an ideal location for a town it was also relatively remote and isolated from the commercial and population center that was growing in downtown San Diego. Development of Pacific Beach could not be contemplated without a transportation link to San Diego and in the 1880s that meant a railroad.

The first railroad line in San Diego was the California Southern Railroad, a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which built a line from National City to Colton via Temecula Gorge, passing through San Diego and Old Town, along the eastern shore of False Bay, as Mission Bay was then known, and through Rose Canyon. This line reached Colton in 1882, was extended to San Bernardino in 1883 and through the Cajon Pass to Barstow in 1885, where it linked up with the transcontinental Atlantic & Pacific Railroad, another Santa Fe subsidiary, and enabled the influx of population that fed the Great Boom.

With the growth of population, other rail transportation systems began growing up in and around San Diego. The San Diego Street Car Company laid tracks in city streets in the downtown area and began operating a horse car line in 1886. The development of Coronado in 1886 included construction of a rail line across the peninsula between the ferry landing on San Diego Bay and the site on the ocean where the Hotel del Coronado was being built, and the line was eventually extended along the Silver Strand and around the bay to provide direct rail service from San Diego.

In August 1886 the trustees of the City of San Diego granted a franchise for a railway connecting downtown San Diego and Old Town to James McCoy and George Neale. The San Diego and Old Town Street Railroad Company was incorporated on August 20, 1886, by McCoy, Neale, F. E. Bates, A. Hart, Amun Sevort and John R. Jones to construct and operate a street railroad under the terms of this franchise [142]. Rails were laid north along Arctic Street (now Kettner) from a station at D Street (now Broadway) to Bean Street where the line jogged west for a block then turned north again and continued along what are now California Street and San Diego Avenue to the Old Town Plaza. The line was originally constructed to be an electric railway, the first in San Diego and one of the first in the country, and a power station was constructed at Arctic and Kalmia Streets [143].

Construction of the Old Town line was completed in October 1887 and operations began using a steam 'dummy' acquired from the National Iron Works on October 9²¹. The electric 'motors' began running November 9, 1887 [144]. However, less than a month later, on December 3, 1887, the *San Diego Union* reported that the San Diego and Old Town Railroad would withdraw its electric equipment and transfer it to the Electric Rapid Transit Company for use on the Fourth Street Line. The Old Town line would install heavier rails and first-class rolling stock and steam power. 'The new motors will be capable of running thirty miles an hour, and the time between D street and Old Town will be reduced to ten minutes' [145].

With a railway from San Diego to Old Town already under construction in 1887 the 'syndicate of millionaires' planning the development of Pacific Beach took steps to extend this railway to Pacific Beach. The San Diego and Pacific Beach Railway Company was incorporated on July 18, 1887, with George Hensley, J. R. Thomas, D. C. Reed, Thomas Metcalf and O. S. Hubbell as the initial board of directors; R. A. Thomas and D. P. Hale were also listed as stockholders [146]²². The San Diego Board of Trustees approved Ordinance No. 137 on September 26, 1887, granting the company the right to construct, operate and maintain a railroad commencing at the Old Town terminus of the San Diego and Old Town Street Railway on Washington Square and following a specified route to the ocean in Pacific Beach [147].

Although the October 1887 subdivision map of Pacific Beach had featured a railroad traversing the subdivision from the eastern shore of False Bay to the Pacific Ocean and the Pacific Beach Company had advertised a 'motor road now nearing completion' that would carry passengers to and from the Beach, trains were still not running by the time of the Pacific Beach Company's opening sale on December 12, 1887. A temporary interchange at Morena had been arranged with the California Southern and construction had begun from there through Pacific Beach to the ocean. From the interchange at Morena the route

²¹A steam dummy was a small steam locomotive entirely enclosed within an external superstructure so as to hide the boiler and other mechanical parts and give it the appearance of an ordinary coach or streetcar, supposedly making it quieter and less likely to frighten people or horses when operating on street railways.

²²J. R. and R. A. Thomas, Hubbell, Reed, Hale, Metcalf and George Hensley, along with Charles Collins and W. W. Thomas were also the initial directors of the Pacific Beach Company when it was incorporated on July 28. By August 15, the Thomases, Hensley, Reed, Hubbell and Hale, plus Thomas Whaley, A. C. Platt, E. W. Morse and A. G. Gassen had also taken over the San Diego and Old Town Street Railroad.

Our next bed is dahlias. What a glorious mass of color, with their thick stem, dark green leaves and spidery petals. It gives one strength to look at them.

One of our prime favorites is the cactus variety. Planted at the end of May, they bloom from the last of June to December. The more blooms you pick the more you have.

Now comes to us the most beautiful bed of all - wonderful because we think we have coaxed nature into doing double duty. At present there is nothing but dead leaves to show for what was a few weeks ago a glorious bed of gladiolus flowers, containing over 600 bulbs, and each one of them bore a stem of cherry-red blossoms, 18 inches in length, and all were in bloom at the same time. Put in the ground the last week of May, by the first of July they were in their prime. The bulbs are ready now to take up and dry for two weeks, when we shall plant them again, and they will repeat the performance. The ancestors of these bulbs were given to me four years ago. I think there were six or eight of them; now we have over 100 good ones and have given as many away.

Here is the Japanese garden, and leading us through the pergola of cypress logs, are flat stepping stones I picked up on the beach. I never go to the beach that I do not find some treasure - flat stones for the walks, or perhaps a piece of worm-eaten rock for the fish pond. If I cannot bring my find with me, I put it aside until a wagon can go for it. . .

The chrysanthemum bed is bordered with a rustic edging of fig tree twigs, saved from the last pruning, and, by the way we do not throw a stick away, for the more twisted it is the more likely it will fit just the right place in making a garden seat or flower basket.

Peeping through the pines, I see the cane summer-house made from our own canes. Less than five years ago I brought the parent root from Coronado in my pocketbook, and now we have enough to plant acres. We cut it down in early spring, saving the cuttings for garden work, cover large barrels with it, weaving the cane together with string, and in these we grow the sprengeri. We also use it for staking the carnations and chrysanthemums. There is no end to the uses for it; it is such a cheerful grower, and the young growth is very beautiful [406].

Fred Scripps had also been accumulating other property in Pacific Beach. In 1903 he acquired Acre Lots 43 and 44, between Diamond, Allison (now Mission Boulevard), Chalcedony and Cass Streets [407] and subdivided it as Ocean Front Addition [408]. Closer to home, he extended his bayside property another block east by purchasing Acre Lot 70 and Block 387 (except for lots 33 and 34) [409]. In 1904 he added another 1 1/3 acres of land west of and adjoining his original Poisers 1 Acre property, between the bay shore and Acre Lot 71 [410]. He also purchased the 'unnumbered lots east of the Depot Grounds'¹¹⁹ [411]

¹¹⁹ The original Wheeler map and first revision (Map 697) of the Pacific Beach subdivision had left the entire 4-block area between First and Third Streets (now Mission Boulevard and Cass) and Reed and Hubbell Avenues (Pacific Beach Drive) unsubdivided and designated as the 'Depot'. Subsequent subdivision maps (791 and 858) had reduced the 'Depot Grounds' to a smaller area around First Street but had not re-subdivided the area to the east, which became known as 'the unnumbered lots east of the Depot Grounds'.