



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES SUPERVISOR • FOURTH DISTRICT

JANICE HAHN

Righting a Historic Injustice at Bruce's Beach



The History of Bruce's Beach

History: The Resort

1912 - Charles and Willa Bruce purchased land on the strand in Manhattan Beach

They built a resort known as “Bruce’s Beach.”

Welcomed Black beachgoers at a time when most CA beaches prohibited Black residents



History: Community

Bruce's Beach became increasingly popular

Expanded to include a restaurant and a dance hall.

Around this same time, six other Black families purchased plots of land behind Bruce's Beach and built their homes.



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MEET ME THERE!—WHERE?

Bruce's Beach

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 1922

GRAND EXCURSION AND SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNIC
Given by the St. Paul Baptist Church

A grand outing and day of pleasure. Various contests are open and prizes worth your while will be awarded the winners at 3:00 P. M.

Note The Contests

Most Popular Minister on Grounds; Most Popular Young Lady on the Grounds; Most Popular Married Lady on the Grounds; Most Popular Marriageable Young Man on the Grounds; Largest Family on the Grounds.

Fare

Adults—Round Trip, 75c; Children (6 to 12 years)—Round Trip, 40c.

Trains leave 4th and Hill Sts., at 9:50 a. m. and 1:00 p. m. —Return 5:30 p. m. and 6:00 p. m.

REV. R. N. HOLT, Pastor

Phone: South 4918.
C. L. COLES, Chairman General Committee
Phone: 271684.

Tickets on Sale at: California Eagle Office, 824 Central Ave.; Mattox & Sons Grocery, 5122 Long Beach Ave.; May's Sweet Shop, 20th at Hooper; Johnson's Pharmacy, Cor. Normandie and Jefferson.

History: Opposition

White residents react with hostility

- Black patrons were repeatedly harassed
- Fake “No Trespassing” and “No Parking” signs were put up to deter visitors

When harassment doesn't work, white residents began pressuring the Manhattan Beach City Council to take action against Bruce's Beach

Manhattan Beach.

COLORED PEOPLE'S RESORT MEETS WITH OPPOSITION.

REDONDO BEACH, June 24.—The establishment of a small summer resort for negroes at North Manhattan has created great agitation among the white property owners of adjoining land.

The new summer resort which at present consists of a small portable cottage with a stand in front where soda pop and lunches are sold, and two dressing tents with shower baths and a supply of fifty bathing suits, was opened last Monday by the dusky proprietor and patronized by many colored people from Los Angeles.

Yesterday when a good-sized Sunday crowd of pleasure seekers had gathered and donned their bathing suits to disport in the ocean, they were confronted by two deputy Constables who warned them against crossing the strip of land in front of Mrs. Bruce's property to reach the ocean.

For a distance of over half a mile from Peck's pier to Twenty-fourth street, a strip of ocean frontage is owned by George H. Peck, who also owns several hundred acres of land in the Manhattan addition where Mrs. Bruce's property is situated. This strip has been staked off and "no trespassing" signs put up and consequently the bathers yesterday could not get to the beach without walking beyond Peck's strip of ocean frontage.

This small inconvenience, however, did not deter the bathers, on pleasure bent, from walking the half mile around Peck's land and spending the day swimming and jumping the breakers. All along the beach in front of the prohibited strip which was patrolled by the constables, the light-hearted "cullud" people frolicked in the breakers or lay on the warm sand.



Mrs. W. A. Bruce,

Colored woman, who has created a storm at Manhattan Beach by establishing a seaside resort for the members of her race.

History: Eminent Domain

1924 - Manhattan Beach City Council votes to seize Bruce's Beach and surrounding land through eminent domain for the purpose of building a park.

Prohibit any future "bath houses" in the area

"We thought that the Negro problem was going to stop our progress... We had to acquire these two blocks to solve the problem, so we voted to condemn them and make a city park there. We had to protect ourselves. Our attorney advised members of the council never to admit the real purpose and establishment of the park, especially during the council meetings."

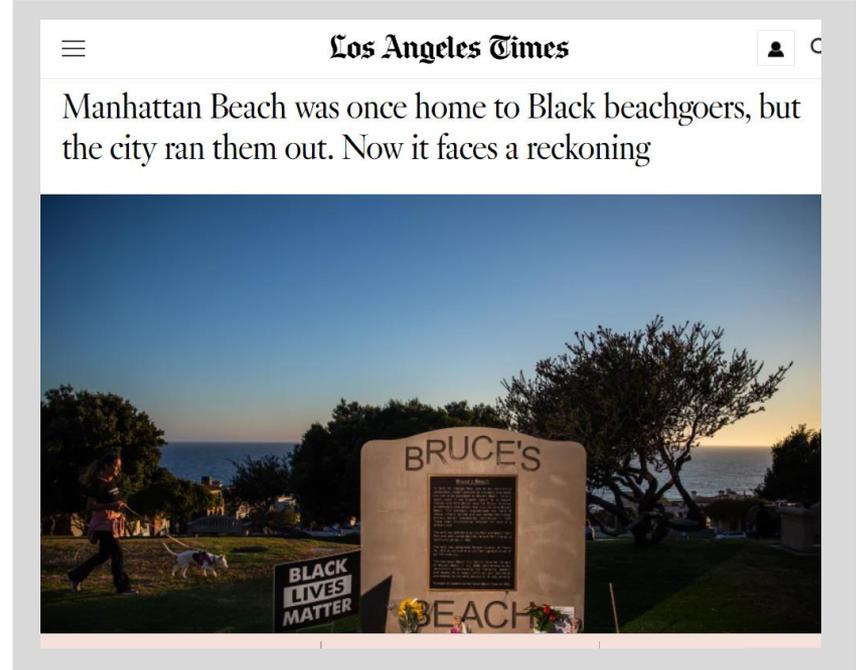
– Councilmember Frank Daugherty, 1943

Land sat empty for decades.

2020: History Uplifted



Kavon Ward and activists at Bruce's Beach

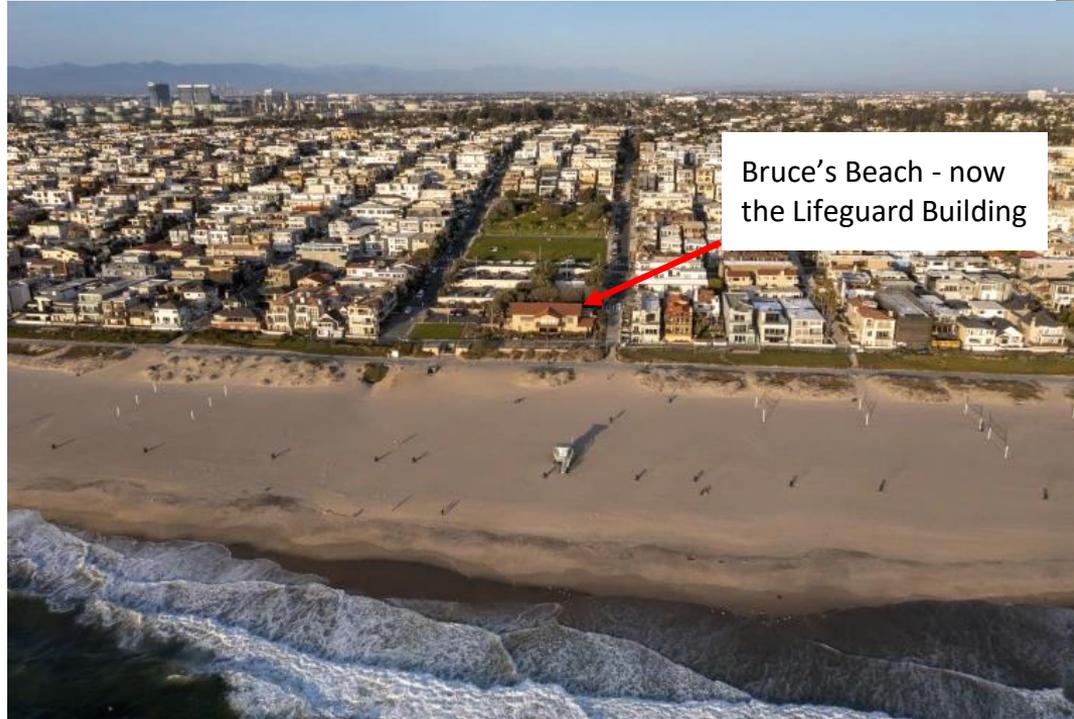


Land Transfer History

1948 - the City of Manhattan Beach transfers the beach-front plot of land to the State

1956 - the City of Manhattan Beach builds a park on the remaining land taken through eminent domain

1995 - the State transferred their land to the County of Los Angeles as part of a transfer of 8 state beaches to the County



LA County's Efforts to Return Bruce's Beach



Senate Bill 796

SB 796 (Bradford):

1. Recognizes that there is public benefit in returning the land to right the historic wrong
2. Directs the state to amend the property deed to remove restrictions prohibiting transfer of the land
3. Grandfathers the Bruces into 1975 property tax rates and exempted the transfer from state income taxes



SB 796 Passage

SB 796 passes both CA State Assembly and Senate with unanimous bipartisan support

September 30, 2021: Governor Gavin Newsom signs SB 796 into law at Bruce's Beach in the presence of Willa and Charles Bruce's great great grandson, Anthony Bruce

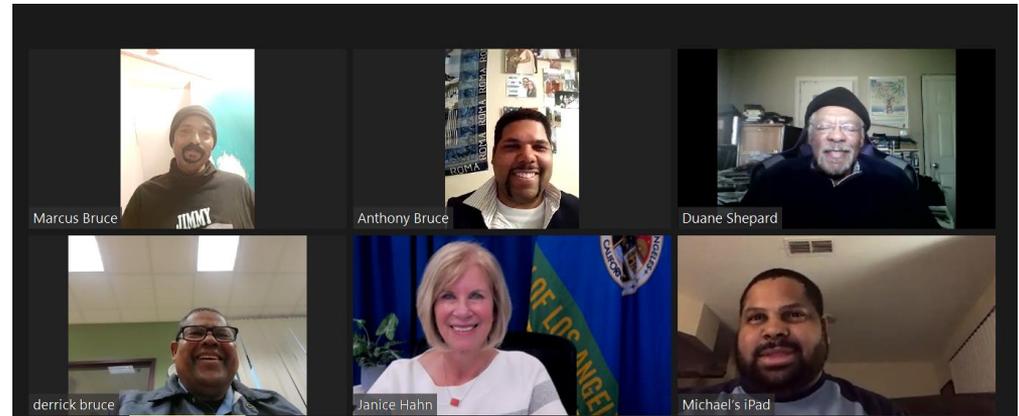


Determining Heirs

The County embarked on a process to confirm the closest living direct descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce

Retained a law firm and genealogist to conduct the determination process

Claimants from around the country submitted heirship affidavits



Future of Bruce's Beach Property





Questions?