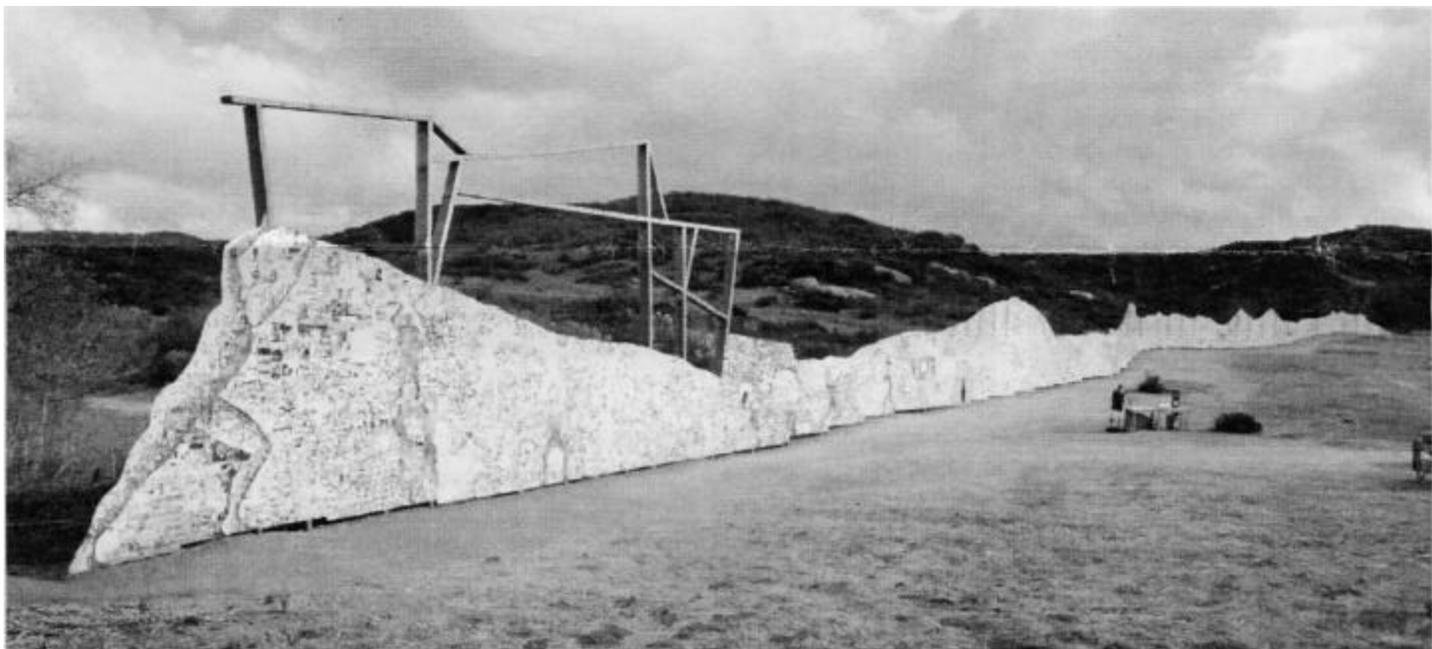




COUNTY COURIER

Official Publication of the Orange County Historical Society

The History of Saving Laguna Canyon



Our March 11, 2004 program comes from The Laguna Beach Historical Society. It is a slide show presentation by Jerry Burchfield and Mark Chamberlain on the recent History of Saving Laguna Canyon. The following article is from *Laguna Life*, Fall 2003 newsletter written by Gene Felder, president of the Laguna Beach Historical Society.

“The History of Laguna Beach, as we know it, actually starts in Laguna Canyon. The first white settlers came from Aliso City, [as Lake Forest, later El Toro used to be known], to the crossroads of El Niguel Creek (El Toro Road) and Laguna Canyon Creek, and settled there.

Located in Laguna Canyon are the only natural lakes in Orange County. To the northwest of the present road, a vernal pool formed, and to the east, another larger lake believed to be fed by a natural spring formed, giving us two distinct lakes. Laguna’s name come from the lakes in the canyon, “La Cañada de Las Laguna’s.”

Mark Chamberlain and Jerry Burchfield have for over twenty years been concerned about the environment in Laguna Canyon. Being artists, they used their photographic talents. A number of projects commenced with perhaps, the most significant being the Tell. A “Tell” is made up of the remains of a succession of previous settlements. “The Tell” was the focus of “Save the Canyon” and the terminus of the “Walk in the Canyon” in 1989.

During the spring of 1989, Mark Chamberlain and Jerry Burchfield gathered support including from the City of Laguna Beach to have a collaborative art project constructed at Sycamore Flats along Laguna Canyon Road. All they needed was funding, and materials including about 1000,000 photographs which many people throughout Orange County and beyond donated. The artists used the colors of the individual photographs to create shapes, and with the knowledge that over the summer the colors would fade.

On November 11, 1989, the Walk in the Canyon started at Irvine Bowl Park and ended at “The Tell” at Sycamore Flats. It was reported that approximately 7,500 people attended this event where they demonstrated their concerns about the development of Laguna Canyon. The cry was “Save Laguna Canyon”. A direct result was stopping the Irvine Company’s 3,500 housing unit Laguna Laurel development in Laguna Canyon, the City of Laguna Beach negotiating to purchase the property, and Laguna Beach citizens passing a \$20 million bond measure with a neatly 80% yes vote.

The Laguna Canyon Conservancy (LCC) was the key driver sponsoring the Walk in the Canyon. It was cosponsored by the Laguna Greenbelt, Village Laguna and the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce. The support of the City of Laguna Beach was indispensable. City council at the time was comprised of Mayor Bob Gentry, mayor Pro Tem Lida Lenney, Martha Collison, Neil Fitzpatrick

and Dan Kenney. The cooperation of City Manager Ken Frank and Police Chief Neil Purcell was exemplary.

The Laguna Canyon Conservancy was founded only a few years prior dedicated to Save the Canyon. It was founded by Lida Lenner and had many founding members including current Mayor Toni Iseman [who was the Phantom of the Canyon], Beth Leeds, Jim Rushing, Linda Rushing and Carolyn Wood among others. There were three main threats to the canyon: 1) massive grading and realignment of big bend, 2) the San Joaquin Transportation Toll road, and 3) the Irvine Company's Laguna Laurel housing project. Environmentalists had recently won the big bend battle with a favorable ruling from the California Coastal Commission. In 1989, the imminent threat to the canyon was the Irvine Company's housing project which included their idea of open space in the canyon — a golf course!

Luckily, the LCCs outreach program reached Harry Huggins who put together an organizing effort with his committee working day and night for two months putting the spectacular event together.

Lida Lenney suggested that the LCC picket Irvine company President Donald Bren's Linda isle home and picket on Laguna Canyon Road near the El Toro intersection. Thankfully, one of the people to notice the picketing was Harry Huggins who stopped his car to find out what was going on. Despite living in Laguna Beach for years, Harry was just learning the unthinkable prospects and dedicated himself to doing something about it.

Harry and his committee did stellar work garnering great publicity for the Walk getting Jose Feliciano and Don Henly of the Eagles to do public service announcements that were played on a number of radio stations and shown on cable television.

November 11 was chosen as it is Armistice Day [Veterans Day] which fell on a Saturday in 1989 and we were in need of a peace settlement to save the beauty and tranquility of the natural open space in Laguna Canyon. There was significant outreach to other environmental groups as the Walk was dedicated to save all the canyons in Orange County.

It turned out to be a beautiful day. It was quite exciting to be there as wave after wave of concerned citizens came to meet at the Festival of Arts grounds. Not everything went



In Laguna Canyon

POSTCARD FROM DON DOBMEIER COLLECTION

perfectly. The plan was for a large group of children to lead the Walk. Actually, at neither the designated time nor at any signal, the Walk started. The program had songs printed in it. Despite numerous efforts, the Walkers were not in a singing mood. The mood was celebratory and at the same time somber.

I like to say that the Walk brought the Irvine Company to its knees. It certainly is true that such an outpouring of public support brought them to the negotiating table. Paul Freeman [who later was Laguna Beach Councilman and Mayor] was hired as a facilitator and skillfully led the City and the Irvine Company to an agreement. Taxpayers can look at their property tax bills and see the entry that raises their property tax approximately 6%. This was authorized by the Laguna Beach city voters and raised \$20 million to make part of the initial payment. Environmentalists had previously secured \$10 million by getting qualifying signatures for 1988 State bond measure Proposition 70 receiving a \$10 million line item for expanding the Laguna Greenbelt. The County of Orange kicked in \$10 million. Thereafter the search was on for funding, made a bit easier as we had stepped up to making our own sacrifice.

After such a successful event, it's been suggested many times, let's do it again. This is easier said than done. We had a very successful Toll Road Awareness Day on February 29, 1992. 1,500 people was a great turnout, but it paled compared to the Walk's success. For many years there was a sign near Sycamore

Hills stating that the City of Laguna Beach opposed the toll road that would be 40 feet high and 800 feet wide along Laguna Canyon Road. Go there now, and we can see that we lost the battle.

The City was only able to exercise four of the agreement's five parcel options. The remaining parcel five is the smallest about 300 acres, and the Irvine Company retained development rights to construct about 1,500 housing units there. That is why it was so crucial for Donald Bren and the Irvine Company to announce last year [2002] that it was giving this and many thousands of acres of Orange County open space set aside to be kept natural forever. Laguna Canyon Foundation was formed to track this problem and seek funding to solve it.

The environmental battle to "Save the Canyon" continues. As Cliff Wassman writes in the current issue of *Costa D'Oro* magazine, "Orange County resurrected a long-standing plan to realign Laguna Canyon road, shifting it westward, away from three natural lakes which for years have suffered from run of f from Canyon Road and erosion caused by cattle grazing on the land. The three small lakes are the only natural lakes in Orange County and provide a nesting habitat for water birds such as mallards and night herons. Large mouth bass swim in the largest of the lakes, which are an important water source for deer and smaller mammals."

LAGUNA BEACH

THREE ARCH BAY

Accounts of life in early Orange County reproduced in recent issues of *County Courier* recalled trips to Laguna Beach as "the place to go" on the coast. Jorice Maag just gave us a copy of the *Laguna Beach Independent* featuring Three Arch Beach. In the section Laguna Home Companion which presents history and culture of the Laguna Beach area in each issue, Francie Holder writes: "The information for this article [on Three Arch Bay] comes from a website. light-headed.com, a spot found by a serendipitous accident. Light-headed.com, created by Steve and Karen Turnbull, [both artists residing in Three Arch Bay], has wonderful pictures and information about miscellaneous aspects of Laguna life, all written in a delightful, light-hearted style." While the site has valuable information on the history of the area, it is also beautifully designed, pleasing to the eye and easy to navigate. For a historical society recommendation to a web site,

that is all that needs to be said. But this site is so much more, the title gives a hint into the creative character of the web designer, Steve Turnbull, but only a hint. The site has color and sound and when you read the section in his web site titled **The World's First Graphic "Web Pages"** you understand why. In addition to **Historic Three Arch Bay Postcards**, there is, **South Laguna in History** with photos from Howard Wilson. Karen's father who came to Laguna Beach with his family in 1920. Included is material from the book "*From The Ozarks To Aliso*" by Karen Wilson Turnbull, "George Wilson's granddaughter, as part of her Master's Thesis in History at California State University at Fullerton, published in 1975. It is the verbatim transcription of that interview, and not edited in the least. Straight from the horses mouth, so to speak." Here is a small portion from that book:

Karen: *Where was the first place you settled when you got to Laguna?*

George: It was up on Thalia and Cuprian Way. Kelly and I lived in a tent up there while we were building those cabins. The

first time we came down, old man Isch's store was over there close to where the White House Cafe is now. We went in there and got some groceries and stuff. I had a ten dollar bill and gave it to old man Isch. He says, "I can't change it." I says, "Well, that's the only thing I've got right now." He says, "You can come back tomorrow and pay me." He didn't write down how much was owed him or nothin', you know."

More recent history is covered in a fascinating first person account with great photos by Steve Turnbull of the Laguna Fire of 1993 as it progressed.

The society is well acquainted with Karen Wilson Turnbull works as the now out of print *Three Arch Bay; an Illustrated History*, was published by Friis-Pioneer Press. Also, her books, *The cottages and castles of Laguna; historic architecture 1883-1940* and *The rustic charm of old Orange County, Volume I, South County* are in the society's library.

The same postcards the Society has scanned in recent months also appear on his web site with the following information on each postcard from Steve:

THE FAMOUS THREE ARCHES IN THREE ARCH BAY, LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA



Although I am unsure of the date, because the card is unused and there is no date anywhere else to be found, I have seen others from this same series and printer and they all have postmarks from 1927 onward. The lack of homes on the far cliffs also seems to verify this assumed date.

Postcard from Don Dobmeier Collection



Above postcard from Jorice Maag Collection

From Steve Turnbull, "This linen postcard mailed in 1932 shows the famous "lighthouse" overlooking one of the smaller coves at the north end of Three Arch Bay. The lighthouse is not an actual navigation device, but a part of the home, built by Hollywood Director / Producer Edward H. Griffith, just out of view to the left. The lighthouse is quite a large structure, over four stories high. [Had a bedroom, bath and library] A ladder is used to gain entrance to each higher floor, through a trapdoor that is lockable from above, until one reaches the very top - a secluded reading library. Mr. Griffith sure loved his privacy!"



"An unusual aerial view of Three Arch Bay on this beautiful linen postcard shows how much open space there was not too long ago. I believe this was taken around 1932, but I have yet to confirm that date."

Postcard from Don Dobmeier collection

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- Board Meeting
- Thursday Mar. 4, 2004 at 7:00 PM at the Kidseum

March Meeting

- Thursday, Mar. 11, 2004
- Meeting at 7:30 p.m.
- At the Kidseum
- **The History of Saving Laguna Canyon Slide Show**
- by Jerry Burchfield and Mark Chamberlain
- April 8, Meeting
- To be announced



Where will you find books on local history? Your best source is your Orange County Historical Society.

Books listed below in BOLD are pictured and described on our website: www.orangecountyhistory.org

Don't see the book you are looking for? ASK US. If we don't have it we will help you find it.

WEBSITE ADDITIONS:

A Timeline of Orange County History from *The Golden Promise* by Pamela Hallan-Gibson.

A list of current home and walking tours in areas of Orange and Los Angeles Counties.

| PLACE A DOLLAR AMT. OPPOSITE EACH ITEM YOU WISH TO ORDER | | |
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| Bawdy Balboa by Judge Robert Gardner | \$25.00 | |
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| Centennial Bibliography of Orange County | \$70.00 | |
| House of Bernardo Yorba by Don Meadow | \$4.00 | |
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| Orange County Through Four Centuries By Dr. Leo J. Friis | \$15.95 | |
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| ORANGE COUNTY The Golden Promise by Pamela Hallan-Gibson 2002 edition | \$37.00 | |

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| Proceedings of the Conference of Orange County History | 1988 | \$11.00 | |
| | 1989 | \$11.00 | |

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Postage and Handling (\$3.00 first item, \$1 each additional)

Orange Blossoms is **\$5 per book**, \$1 each additional

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Make checks payable to OCHS

MAIL TO: John Sorenson, 14932 Gainford Circle, Irvine CA 92604

Call him (949) 559-5668 and he will bring your book/s to the next meeting.

