

AFRICAN AMERICAN LEISURE SPACE IN SANTA MONICA

The Beach Sometimes Known As the “Inkwell,” 1900s–1960s

By Alison Rose Jefferson

ABSTRACT: A section of the Ocean Park beach in Santa Monica, California, served as an African American leisure space during the era of segregation. This article identifies the discrimination that African Americans endured, but also celebrates both the local black community formation and the sociable relaxation that Los Angeles African Americans enjoyed at this site.

It was a summer weekend gathering place. You would see everybody . . . all your friends, there,” Ivan J. Houston recalled of the beach in the Ocean Park area of Santa Monica where African Americans could enjoy sand, surf, and sociability during an era of segregation—an era that did not end until the 1960s. Houston, a long-time Los Angeles resident and retired head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, also recalled when the neighboring Casa del Mar Beach Club rebuilt a 1920s era fence out into the water, so that “people” would not “trespass” on the public beach in front of the exclusive clubhouse. Nevertheless, Houston and his friends and family continued to have a pleasant time. Especially as a young adult in the 1940s, he noted, “It could be a very noteworthy, social event

to go to the beach.” He liked to stay in the water a long time, swimming and bodysurfing on those hot-summer-day visits to the “Inkwell,” the derogatory nickname sometimes used by Caucasians for the beach south of Pico Boulevard between Bay and Bicknell streets frequented by African Americans.¹

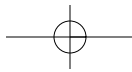
At a time when discrimination and restrictive real estate covenants prevented them from buying property in certain areas or using various public or private facilities, when distinct social barriers and overt discrimination persisted, African Americans were able to locate some relaxation, recreation, and vacation sites in southern California. At these places they were relatively free from bigotry to enjoy the sunshine and picturesque outdoor offerings of California. The section of beach near Pico Boulevard, derogatively described by whites and sardonically referred to by blacks as the “Inkwell,” remained an important recreational area for African Americans from the turn of the twentieth century through the racial conflicts of the 1920s and into the post-war period when social and legal barriers were beginning to crumble.²

Along many stretches of the California coastline, refusal to allow African Americans access to various places of leisure constituted an informal policy that was strictly enforced by many white citizens and policy makers. In the 1920s black taxpayers in the City of Los Angeles were refused the full use of public swimming pools by being allowed access to the pools only one day a week—on the day before they were cleaned. Children’s summer camps were segregated by the City of Los Angeles. Of the five city camps open, only one admitted African American children. In both of these situations when legal challenges were brought against these discriminatory practices and restrictions on the use of public park facilities, the California judiciary threw the suits out of court. These discriminatory public pool and camp policies would not be legally remedied until the 1930s. African Americans did win clarification on unrestricted public access to beach frontage in a court case against the City of Manhattan Beach in 1927. However, in spite of these legal victories, custom and hostility continued to keep some facilities white-only for several decades more.³

Such customary means of maintaining segregation were weakened by United States Supreme Court and California court decisions between 1948 and 1968. It would not be until the U.S. Supreme Court decisions *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) and *Barrows v. Jackson* (1953) that the judicial



Verna Williams and Arthur Lewis at the Santa Monica beach section for blacks referred to as the "Inkwell." They are posing beneath the sign marking the adjoining Club Casa del Mar's exclusive beach.
Los Angeles Public Library, Shades of L.A.: African American Community Collection.



enforcement of restrictive real estate covenants would be overturned and effectively abolished. By the 1960s, at least on paper, the combined effect of *Kraemer* and *Barrows*, along with additional federal enforcement efforts—the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968—prohibited most forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin.⁴

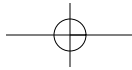
But it is important to recall that for the several decades when segregation reigned, there was a place of sociability, special significance, and warm memories for the African American community in southern California in the Ocean Park neighborhood of the City of Santa Monica. In spite of some threats and exclusionary conditions, this place remained a site where African Americans could enjoy the sun and the surf.

AN OVERLOOKED PAGE OF HISTORY

The beach near the end of Pico Boulevard in the Ocean Park neighborhood of the City of Santa Monica was a leisure site where African American day trippers were relatively free from discrimination. At this site and a few other southland locations, African American families of all economic classes, professional and occupational levels, and social persuasions were able to visit the beach, rent cottages, or, in some cases, buy homes for weekend outings and summer vacations. Some of the African Americans who came for recreation at the beach became permanent residents of the area.⁵

Little sign remains today of the regional leisure sites frequented by African American Angelenos from the 1900s to the 1960s. Documentation of these places has been neglected, and only one building in the beach area has been designated as a historic landmark. Historic sites of African American leisure activity have faded from memory as minority population groups have come to have many more opportunities to explore a much broader array of destinations, both local and distant.

Interviews with black Angelenos whose families have been in the region for the majority of the twentieth century reveal that the beach area near the end of Pico Boulevard had been a gathering place for African Americans. They indicate that this beach usage developed because there was a sepia community living in Santa Monica nearby that drew African Americans to this beach section.



A number of African American families had settled in Santa Monica by the early years of the twentieth century. The continuous presence of an African American church since 1908 in the Ocean Park section of Santa Monica near the Inkwell indicates that the beach was not merely a recreational outpost but the site of community formation.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY: SANTA MONICA AND OCEAN PARK

In the early part of the twentieth century Santa Monica and Ocean Park were renowned for their amusement activities and beach resorts. Santa Monica was connected to Los Angeles by railroad in 1875. An electric trolley railway line from Los Angeles to Santa Monica followed in the 1890s. By 1903 a beach line extended through Santa Monica and Ocean Park along Main Street and Neilson Way through Venice and Playa del Rey to Redondo Beach. By 1911 all these lines were part of the Pacific Electric system.⁶

Until 1907, when Santa Monica became a charter city and absorbed Ocean Park, they were two separate towns. Santa Monica's beaches were popular with Los Angeles residents who traveled by railroad or streetcar for picnics and sunbathing. Numerous hotels and bathhouses, including the Santa Monica (1875); the Arcadia (1887); and the North Beach Bathhouse (1894), were built on the north side for wealthy tourists and health-seekers. Pleasure piers were built, including today's municipal pier at Colorado Avenue. Beginning in the 1880s through the early part of the twentieth century Santa Monica played host to many wealthy easterners, influential business and civic leaders, and movie stars who sought various recreational pursuits and the "freshness of the ocean air." Some built fine houses in this resort community.⁷

Ocean Park, to the southeast of Santa Monica, was originally part of the Machado family's Rancho La Ballona, the Mexican-era land grant that included the localities known today as Ocean Park, Venice, Palms, Culver City, and the Ballona Wetlands. In 1874 the Machados sold 861 acres of what encompassed most of the Ocean Park section (south of Pico Boulevard) to the Lucas family, who grew barley and other grains and in 1875 began subdividing the land into 47 lots. The first lots sold were beachfront properties south of Pico Boulevard on the northwest side of the Lucas Tract. Upscale beach houses were built with extensive gardens by many Los Angeles notables, including Major Henry Hancock and the

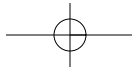


Looking along the Promenade in the pleasure and amusement zone of Ocean Park, California, ca. 1920. *Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives/Connie Cramer-Santa Monica Toastmistress Club Collection.*

Vawter family from Indiana. A number of 10- and 20-acre farms were sold in the 1880s for the production of vegetables for sale.⁸

The Ocean Park district's first general store and the first Presbyterian church in Santa Monica were constructed by the Vawter family in the 1870s. Williamson Dunn Vawter developed Santa Monica's first public transportation system of horse-drawn streetcars which made semi-regular travel between the north side and south side of Santa Monica possible in 1887. His son Edwin organized the First National Bank of Santa Monica and the City Water Company. He eventually sold subdivided tracts of the family's Ocean Park land, which were developed for residential use.⁹

Visionary entrepreneur Abbott Kinney and a partner bought large sections of waterfront property from the Vawter family in 1892 that they subdivided for sale as modest residential parcels (25 by 100 feet). They also developed a pleasure pier, auditorium, casino, and race track. By 1901



the small community they named Ocean Park had two hundred cottages, a post office, and a few stores. In 1904 Kinney split from his partners and began construction on Venice-of-America, a rival amusement park and residence community to the south of Ocean Park, which opened in 1905. The entire coastline from Ocean Park to Venice became known as “the Coney Island of the West.”¹⁰

The attractions and amusements situated in Ocean Park at the turn of the twentieth century made the district one of the most popular destinations in southern California and provided work and tourist income to the community. As the community was oriented toward the beach, the residential development was clustered on the streets closest to the ocean. In the beginning of Ocean Park’s development the Fourth Street hill was the inland boundary of the residential area. The housing consisted of small beach cottages, boarding houses, bungalows, courts, and hotels. Servicing permanent residents and visitors, Main and Pier became the commercial streets of the district. Banks, churches, libraries, schools, civic groups, and local businesses grew up.¹¹

AFRICAN AMERICAN PIONEERS IN THE SANTA MONICA BAY CITIES

The first African Americans moved to Santa Monica in the late nineteenth century to join communities of Chinese, Japanese, old Californios and recent Mexican immigrants, Anglo Americans, and Jews, as well as immigrants of various national backgrounds. The City of Santa Monica is one of the few seaside communities in the region with a historic African American community that continues today and still includes descendants of these early sepia settlers. Seduced by the escapism of the sand-and-surf resort town, the early black Santa Monica pioneers came to seek their dreams of “El Dorado,” just like the other migrants to the area. Many of the new African American émigrés who moved to the Santa Monica area in the first few decades of the twentieth century settled within walking distances of Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, the first African American church established in the Ocean Park district.¹²

The CME congregation was established in 1905, the first one of this denomination in California. Hull House on Third Street in the north section of Santa Monica was the group’s first meeting place. In 1908 an old



Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
at Fourth and Bay streets.

The building was purchased from the Santa Monica School Board and moved to this site in 1908. Shown in the front of the church are Bishop Charles Henry Phillips (*center right foreground*), the pastor, Reverend James A. Stout (*left foreground*), and the Sunday School Convention of the Los Angeles District in 1909. *Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives/Donald A. Brunson Sr. Collection.*

school building that had been damaged by fire was purchased from the Santa Monica School Board to become the first CME Church-owned building in California. The Washington School, built in the 1890s at Ashland Avenue and Fourth Street was moved to its location at 2001 Fourth Street (at Bay Street) on October 4, 1908, to serve as the new church. Phillips Chapel was remodeled in 1910 and the 1940s. The building has retained its historic Colonial Revival architectural style appearance.¹³

At this time segregation in the cities by the bay and in California in general was not so rigid as it would become by the 1920s to 1930s. Most African Americans lived in neighborhood clusters side by side with non-



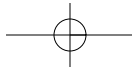
Phillips Chapel in 2005. It was remodeled in 1910 and again in the 1940s. *Photo by Alison Rose Jefferson and Kenneth A. Breisch*

blacks within a few blocks of Phillips Chapel in Ocean Park, as well as in the sections that are now the sites of the Santa Monica Civic Center and part of Santa Monica High School's campus.¹⁴

Farther north, in Santa Monica proper, around Second to Sixth streets near Broadway, there was another neighborhood that included African Americans. This is where Calvary Baptist Church bought its first meeting space from the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1920s. As early as the 1920s African American families began to settle in the Pico neighborhood of Santa Monica, between about Fourteenth and Twenty-fourth streets, between Pico and Santa Monica boulevards. To the south of Ocean Park, the community of Venice also had a cluster neighborhood of African American families.¹⁵

Just as others trekked westward to widely advertised southern California, African Americans came west on the railroads to California and Santa Monica for employment opportunities, the climate, health, beauty, and a more liberated life style. The majority of these black newcomers from the 1880s to post-World War II came to the Santa Monica area from American southern states. Like African Americans who moved to the northeastern part of the United States, those who moved to Santa Monica also looked to escape the worst of Jim Crow segregation.¹⁶

Just as in other parts of the United States in the early twentieth century most African Americans living in the Santa Monica area were employed in service opportunities in domestic work, transportation, and



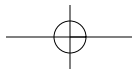
the restaurant and hotel trades as maids, janitors, draymen, and chauffeurs (with the rise in the use of the automobile and the decline of the horse and wagon) due to America's discriminatory practices of the time period. Some were entrepreneurs who ran mom-and-pop enterprises such as boarding houses, barber shops, beauty salons, hauling/trucking companies, and other service-related small businesses. The only professional persons with formal education during this time period of African American lineage in Santa Monica were a minister or two.

Gilbert McCarroll was one of the earliest African Americans documented to have opened a shop in Santa Monica. He owned a short-lived shoe-shine parlor that served both men and women on Pier Avenue in the Ocean Park district around 1907. When the shop closed he went to work as a doorman for California Bank. Later, in 1928, he opened Gilbert's Grocery and Soda Fountain, a very popular spot located at Eighteenth and Broadway streets. It too was short lived, but his shop was the center of many fond memories for African American residents of Santa Monica.¹⁷

Walter L. Gordon established Gordon Day Work Company in Ocean Park in 1902 specializing in house and window cleaning and janitorial service. The business lasted at least eight years and at one time had a workforce of seventeen employees. A 1906 photograph taken in front of the Gordon office features some of the employees of differing ethnic groups with bicycles that have Gordon Day Work Company advertising signs situated in the open space of the bike frame. After moving to Los Angeles, Gordon worked for a time at the U.S. Post Office as a letter carrier and successfully tried his hand at other business ventures. After leaving the post office in 1923 he organized the Walter L. Gordon Company, a very successful real estate firm headquartered on Central Avenue in Los Angeles.¹⁸

When Charles Brunson arrived in Santa Monica in 1905 from Americus, Georgia, he had little education. He earned a living with a horse and wagon hauling construction material for builders and carrying tourists' luggage from the train stations in Los Angeles to the luxury hotels along the Santa Monica shoreline. Mostly unpaved, Pico and Olympic boulevards were at that time the only thoroughfares to connect Santa Monica with Los Angeles. The trips to and from the downtown Los Angeles train stations took a half day each way.¹⁹

Charles lived with his wife, Selena McDonald Brunson, and their fifty chickens and two horses on Fifth Street, then a small dirt road five blocks



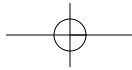
from the beach. At the time, this was a neighborhood of shotgun houses and other small vertical wood board cottages. Some of them had been moved by horse-power to this area by residents; the majority of these structures had been makeshift ocean-front vacation cottages with no plumbing or electricity. Located in this area today are Santa Monica High School and the Civic Center complex. This is also where the Brunsons' two sons, Donald (1907) and Vernon (1909), were born.²⁰

The Brunsons divorced by the time Donald began school. Selena and the boys stayed on at the Fifth Street residence. They initially used kerosene lamps for light. The bathroom arrangement was in a room in the back of the house: seats on two holes that emptied into a cesspool. At the time there was no water meter, but service was delivered for a fee of one dollar per month. Eventually Selena saved enough money to bring electricity to the house. A wood-burning stove served for both cooking and heating.²¹

Selena supplemented Charles' child-support payments with work as a piece ironer at Gallow's, a domestic hand laundry on Ocean Park Boulevard. Being a minister's daughter, she saw to it that her sons attended the only African American church in town, Phillips Chapel. The family later attended other churches in Santa Monica, including the Anglo Methodist Sunday School near Arizona Avenue and Lincoln Boulevard. In the 1920s after the First African American Episcopal Church of Santa Monica was established inland at Michigan Avenue and Eighteenth Street, they remained active members there for the duration of their lifetimes.²²

Several other pioneering Santa Monica African American families resided in the neighborhood where the Brunson family lived. One of the patriarchs of the Boyd family, Emmitt, came to Santa Monica after his military discharge in San Francisco following World War I. He had a team of horses and mules he used to grade streets and haul luggage to and from the downtown Los Angeles train depots. Other members of the family followed his lead and joined him out West.²³

His brother-in-law, James Maxwell, a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, came soon after with his family and worked with another brother-in-law as a plasterer. A former school teacher, Maxwell helped to start the Santa Monica-Venice Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) around 1920. He served as president of the local chapter for seven years. By 1920 the



total population of Santa Monica had grown almost 50 percent since 1910 to 15,252 people. The African American community had grown from 191 to 282 members.²⁴

In Venice, Arthur L. Reese and his family were pioneering African Americans who settled there. Originally from Louisiana, Reese came to Los Angeles as a Pullman porter in 1902. He liked what he saw, and he decided to stay. Reese heard about Abbot Kinney and the building of Venice-of-America, just south of Ocean Park. In 1904 he rode the street-car out to Venice to see what kind of economic opportunities might be available for him with the Kinney operation. He started a shoe-shine business, then a maintenance service, which thrived. Reese then became the maintenance supervisor for the Kinney properties. He would eventually have charge of decorations for the Kinney facilities. He later was involved with other business ventures in Venice, as well. Under his supervision was a work force of a few dozen people, many of them family members he recruited to move to California to work with him. Members of the Reese, Tabor, and other families who worked for Arthur Reese's or Abbott Kinney's enterprises were some of the first African Americans to live in Venice.²⁵

Reese had other notable achievements in his business career. He was appointed to the election board and became a member of the Venice Chamber of Commerce in 1920. During this time period it was not a common occurrence in America for an African American businessman to be a member of an Anglo organization of this type. Another of his civic accomplishments was as a founding member of the Crescent Bay Lodge Number 19, a Masonic lodge formed in Santa Monica in 1910. He also served as the charitable and benevolent activities organization leader, the lodge worshipful master, in the 1940s. The lodge today continues to exist at a site on Eighteenth Street and Broadway.²⁶

In Santa Monica African American social life was centered on the family, the church, evolving social and civic organizations, civil rights groups, and the limited number of public places and private enterprises that allowed them patronage. In the 1920s, for recreation activities, this meant that African Americans could visit only certain beach areas, swim at municipal pools only on the day before the water was changed, or attend movies, concerts, and thespian presentations at selective theaters without being relegated to segregated seats.²⁷



Selena McDonald Brunson and Charles E. A. Brunson holding baby Donald A. Brunson, the first African American child born in Santa Monica, April 1907. They are posing for the photograph on the Santa Monica Pier, looking north toward the Long Wharf. *Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives/Donald A. Brunson Sr. Collection.*

Following World War I the population in the region rapidly accelerated. The Los Angeles city population grew from 102,479 in 1900 to 576,673 in 1920, and in Santa Monica from 3,057 to 15,252 during the same period. In 1920, although African Americans in Santa Monica numbered fewer than 300, the black population in Los Angeles was 15,579, up from 2,131 in 1900. Santa Monica's unique relationship as a playground to Los Angeles brought many new tourists, day-trippers, and residents to Santa Monica from all walks of life.²⁸

As Anglo Americans from southern states became more entrenched in California and the African American population increased in visibility, affluence, and assertiveness in their pursuit of leisure activities, so too did the institutionalized restrictions and racism that they experienced. In the first few decades of the twentieth century racism in Los Angeles and Santa Monica was more subtle than it was blatant. Unlike in the southern states, many obvious barriers to equal opportunities were dismantled in California. It was unpredictable where African Americans would encounter discrimination, and California was more diverse than black-white due the presence of multiple racial and ethnic groups. As in Los Angeles, though not always stated explicitly in Santa Monica, African Americans knew from experience they were unwelcome at many hotels, restaurants, theaters, and other establishments.²⁹

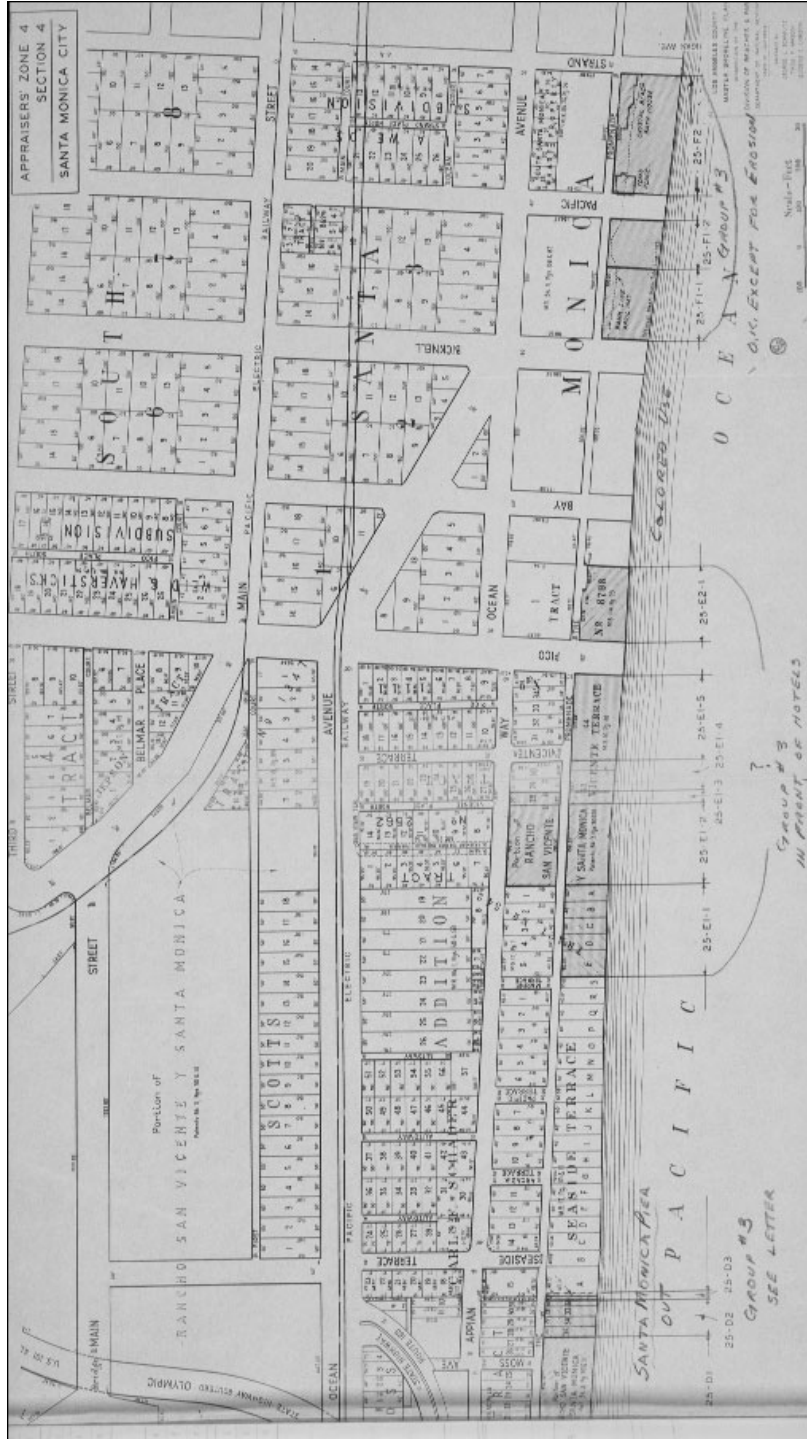
AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE SANTA MONICA BAY SITE SOMETIMES KNOWN AS THE "INKWELL"

In the first decades of the twentieth century African Americans from Santa Monica and Los Angeles first congregated around the end of Pico Boulevard, north of the site of Crystal Plunge, which was destroyed by a storm in 1905 and abandoned after that. They were relatively free to enjoy the shoreline south from Pico to Ocean Park Boulevard. At this time most of the tourist activity, other than walking along Ocean Front Promenade from the Santa Monica pier to Venice Pier, was about a half mile to the north and south of the Pico Boulevard area of Central Santa Monica and Ocean Park. This area around Pico Boulevard near the shore was not so densely packed with development and people as it would become with the population growth that brought new waves of tourists and residents to all of Los Angeles County, and specifically Santa Monica.³⁰



Tourist activity at the turn of the century included walking along Ocean Front Promenade, which connected the Santa Monica Pier (seen in background) and the Ocean Park entertainment zone to the south. The area near the foot of Pico Boulevard, featuring the Arcade (pergola), was not so densely developed and it was here that African Americans felt free to congregate. Taylor Photo. *Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives/Elizabeth R. Sedat Collection.*

By the early 1920s, when exclusive beach clubs began to rise near the foot of Pico Boulevard, the section of the beachfront that is remembered today as the principal gathering place for African American beachgoers was compressed to the portion between Bay and Bicknell streets, a quarter of a mile south of Pico Boulevard. The lavish Casa del Mar Club (today the Casa del Mar Hotel) opened in 1924 on the site of the former Ocean Park Crystal Plunge. It was the first of three large private clubs and the most successful that would open between Pico Boulevard and the Santa Monica Pier to the north. North of the Casa del Mar, at the end of Pico Boulevard, the Edgewater Club was built in 1925. Later, in the 1930s, the Edgewater was known as the Waverly Beach Club and as the Ambassador Club in the 1940s. (Today a new building at the site houses Shutters Hotel on the Beach.) A string of lavish, exclusive and highly advertised beach clubs (and some private residences), would be con-



City of Santa Monica, Los Angeles County Master Shoreline Plan map, 1947, Division of Beaches and Parks,
 Department of Natural Resources, Department of Engineering, State of California.

Note section of the beach marked "Colored Use."
 University of Southern California, Special Collections.

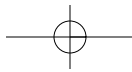
structed beginning in 1922; by the 1930s they stretched all the way from Pico boulevard to Santa Monica Canyon.³¹

Whereas at the public areas of the beach all classes more or less mingled together, at the beach clubs the members stayed within their own private, fenced-in beaches. Restriction and open discrimination against African Americans, Mexicans, Asians, and Jews was imposed at most of these private clubs.³² Pushed southward by the exclusive clubs, the reduced portion of public beach accessible to African Americans became informally known by many as the “Inkwell.” Down the hill from Phillips Chapel at Fourth and Bay streets, near the arcade and park area known today as Crescent Park, and directly south of the Club Casa del Mar beach area, African Americans would meet for beach parties and to socialize. Here they could enjoy the ocean breeze, swim, and play games with less harassment than at other Southland beaches.

During the 1920s, there were some confrontations and assaults, some of which turned violent, aimed at barring African Americans from public beaches. These incidents may have led black Angelenos to avoid other beaches in favor of the Ocean Park beach front as a congregation place. Legal challenges were made to these discriminatory practices.

One such incident involved Arthur Valentine, a chauffeur from Los Angeles out with his family and friends, who was beaten and shot by three sheriff’s deputies on Memorial Day, May 20, 1920. They alleged that Valentine and his extended family had trespassed on private ranch land at the beach adjacent to Topanga Canyon. Other accounts suggest the African American group crossed into an area frequented by white beachgoers at the said site several miles north of the city limits of Santa Monica. A grand jury indicted the sheriff’s deputies involved for assault with a deadly weapon with intent to do bodily harm. After several trial delays the case was final settled in January 1923 with the case against all three deputies being dismissed due to insufficient evidence.³³

History suggests Anglo Americans probably first used the term “Inkwell” to describe more than one leisure site around the United States that African Americans were associated with during the Jim Crow era. The name “Inkwell” was a derogatory term referencing the “blackness” of beachgoers’ skin color. *Some* African Americans took agency and repurposed the offensive term to describe these places they frequented and enjoyed, transforming the hateful moniker into a badge of pride or belong-



ing. The name Inkwell has not been used or recognized universally within the African American community as the name of these leisure locations, with some refusing to use the name at all.³⁴

Keeping in mind patterns of history associated with the Jim Crow era and the rise in visibility of African Americans living in the region and visiting the beach site, it can be surmised that the original and the later reduced sections of Santa Monica beachfront began to be referred to by some majority cultural group members and some African Americans as the Inkwell by the 1920s. In interviews the author conducted with African Americans who enjoyed this Santa Monica leisure space during the period of segregation, the name Inkwell was not universally used to describe this Ocean Park beach area. Further, none of the articles in the local newspapers (African American or general population media) of the day that the author has reviewed about the Santa Monica leisure site refer to this place as the Inkwell.

The Inkwell continued to serve as a recreational site enjoyed by African Americans into the middle decades of the twentieth century. Many a sepia-toned visitor may have stopped by Phillips Chapel for religious fellowship in the morning before heading for the sand, sun, and surf in the afternoon. Others may have headed to La Bonita, a black-owned bathhouse and lodge on Belmar Place (a street that ran north and south but does not exist today) between Pico Boulevard and Main Street where the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is today, or at Thurman's Rest-A-While Apartments at Fifth Street and Broadway to the north in the heart of Santa Monica. At these establishments out-of-towners could rent a bathing suit or a guest room, have a meal, and change their clothes before proceeding by foot or other transportation conveyances to the designated place at the beach.³⁵

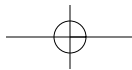
As early as 1914, the Los Angeles-based, African American-owned *California Eagle* newspaper featured news about the happenings at the La Bonita establishment. The newspaper items about this enterprise included social and business notes as well as paid advertisements about the offerings of this hospitality facility. The Venice-Ocean Park-Santa Monica News section of the *California Eagle* on May 23, 1914, reported that La Bonita was already caring for a capacity house. In June the paper mentioned the beach-area establishment was erecting an annex to take care of its usual summer rush and that the proprietors thought they would have an excel-

lent summer. In August 1914 the *Eagle* reported La Bonita proprietor Mr. Warren had erected a tennis court to accommodate his guests.

An ad in the *California Eagle* announced the opening of the La Bonita Café in connection with La Bonita Apartments on Saturday, May 28, 1921. The advertisement emphasized that the enterprise catered to “Auto Parties” and could arrange for “any SPECIAL occasion.” Featured in Ernest Marquez’s 2004 book on Santa Monica Beach, *A Collector’s Pictorial History*, is an aerial photograph taken during the construction of the Casa Del Mar Club in 1924. Looking east from over the Pacific Ocean around Pico Boulevard, in the background can be seen two streets back from the beach the La Bonita enterprise to the north (on the left); Phillips Chapel can be seen to the south (on the right), about four streets inland from the ocean-front construction. One can see vacant lots on either side of the construction site, and behind it there is still quite a bit of open space among the low density residential buildings and trees.³⁶

Thurman’s was located in the early Santa Monica African American neighborhood near the original site of Calvary Baptist at Sixth Street and Broadway. Today the church is located at Twentieth Street and Broadway in a building constructed in 1950. The Dewdrop Inn and Café was also at Second Street and Broadway. The Paxtons owned this restaurant and small apartment building. The late Donald Brunson, an African American born in Santa Monica in 1907 who eventually grew up to be a leader in the Boy Scouts and other civic activities as well as a mail carrier, said in an interview that he remembered walking by the store as a boy admiring the best-looking pastries in town.³⁷

Visitors could also stop to pick up something to eat at the Arkansas Traveler Inn run by the Dumas and Griswold families at Belmar Place near Main Street. Their 1930 advertisements in the *California Eagle* stated that the eatery specialized in southern-style barbecue with genuine barbecue sauce and fried chicken. The “New” La Bonita’s paid advertisements in the *California Eagle* in the same year boasted of thoroughly renovated and sanitary facilities convenient for bathers, with private lockers, a café, and bathing suit rentals, two blocks from the beach. The ads also noted the new management of Frank N. Miller with assistance from Mrs. M. L. Pitre and Mrs. C. Sims and that all patrons at La Bonita facilities would be given the most courteous treatment and best attention. The ad went on to assure patrons they could enjoy La Bonita’s big picnic ground with a large pit for wiener bakes for private parties.³⁸



RACIST CHALLENGES IN THE 1920S

As the ocean front around Pico Boulevard drew increasing numbers of African Americans and businesses catering to them, the Santa Monica Bay Protective League, an Ocean Park neighborhood Anglo home-owners group, unsuccessfully “sought to purge” them from the beach in 1922 by prohibiting leisure business enterprises. Within walking distance of the black residential community and the Pico Boulevard shoreline recreation space, at Third Street and Pico Boulevard—a few blocks southeast of La Bonita, on the southern edge of the today’s Santa Monica Civic Center property—George Caldwell’s dance club hosted parties on Sunday nights, bringing large numbers of African Americans to the bay city. The evening socials got out of hand a few times and complaints by neighbors and the Santa Monica Protective League influenced the municipal authorities to pass an ordinance prohibiting dancing on Sundays. Caldwell, an African American, responded by moving his dances to week nights. The authorities then responded by “[adopting] a blanket ban on dance halls in residential districts.”³⁹

In a *Los Angeles Times* article on July 27, 1922, entitled “Fight against Beach Dance Halls Success,” a *Times* staff correspondent reported:

An ordinance prohibiting dancing at any public hall in the residential districts of Santa Monica and Ocean Park was adopted by the City Council today [July 26, 1922].

The ordinance was aimed at Caldwell’s negro dance hall on Third Street, which has caused many complaints from near-by residents during the past year. . . . A delegation of negroes, headed by George W. Caldwell, voiced their protest to the passage of the ordinance, but it was adopted by a unanimous vote. About seventy five members of the Santa Monica Bay Protective League which is opposed to negroes encroaching upon the city, were present to support the passage of the ordinance.

At the time, many African Americans thought this was a discriminatory action that ought to be protested. They saw it as a case of southern prejudice encroaching on life in California. Los Angeles civil rights attorney Hugh MacBeth noted of the crowds at Caldwell’s Dance Hall that the actions of a few individuals did not merit “wholesale discrimination and limitation” of all African Americans. He encouraged protest to prevent and eradicate this type of southern-style discrimination.⁴⁰

Was it really the case that patrons at Caldwell’s evening events were any more unruly than white patrons of a similar class at other establish-

Advertisement for Caldwell's
Recreation Garden, Santa Monica.
California Eagle, June 10, 1921.

**ORIGINAL
EMANCIPATION
CELEBRATION
HOLIDAY**
AT CALDWELL'S
Recreation Garden
Third Street and Pico Boulevard
Santa Monica, Calif.,
Monday, June 20th

FREE---Big Barbecue---FREE

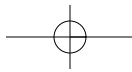
2---C L A S S Y B A N D S---2

Say, But won't it be great to meet your
friends from your old Home town? Everybody
will be there. Plenty of Barbecue for all. If you
don't get it, it won't be the fault of LAWS.

ADMISSION 50c TO RECREATION HALL AND GARDEN

ments, or was the description an exaggeration to justify shutting down the dance hall after police harassment had aggravated patrons who were only trying to have a good time? Was the closing of this festive atmosphere an overzealous way of policing and containing African Americans' leisure activities and freedom of expression because of broader white anxieties over this urban and upwardly mobile labor force and how they chose to use their free time?

As historian Andrew Kahrl has pointed out in examining African American leisure activities on the Potomac River from the 1890s to the 1920s, white Washingtonians needed to image African American gatherings as noisy rather than quiet and sedate at a period when racial cues were increasingly uncertain. This view helped to perpetuate white belief in a defined racial order predicated on distinct and immutable racial characteristics and an ideology of segregation that depended on identifying the racial other as both dangerous and amusing. He has also noted "few images were more threatening to the emerging Jim Crow order than that of a black family relaxing on a beach, books in hand, in silence."⁴¹



At the same time the Santa Monica Bay Protective League was closing down Caldwell's Dance Hall in 1922, the same group also sought to block the efforts of a black venture group from carrying out plans to build a "first-class resort with beach access" near Pico Boulevard and the ocean front, at the location African Americans had been utilizing for at least fifteen years. Charles S. Darden, Esq. (1879–1954), and Norman O. Houston (1893–1997), two civically active and enterprising black Angelenos, were president and secretary, respectively, of the Ocean Frontage Syndicate. The outfit had plans for their facilities to include a bath house, dance hall, and other attractions. To attract patrons, the business plan included advertising from Los Angeles to El Paso seeking to draw 60,000 African Americans to the Santa Monica resort.⁴²

As in other parts of the United States, because they were barred in southern California from most employment with better wages and from managerial positions in corporate America, "ambitious African Americans gravitated toward entrepreneurial ventures, especially those that catered to the group population of [black] Angelenos." The "nationalist surge" of the early 1920s, when Pan Africanist Marcus Garvey would speak at organized meetings in Los Angeles about promoting black pride and political and economic self reliance, strengthened this entrepreneurial trend. It was a theme that had carried over from earlier decades, with black journalists, entrepreneurs, club women, and ministers preaching race progress through enterprise.⁴³

Most likely members of the Ocean Frontage Investment Group were part of the African American population that had prospered after the end of slavery, despite the obstacles and prejudice they faced. During the segregation era, successful blacks developed resorts and amusement facilities similar to the one the group was attempting to build in Ocean Park so they could relax away from Anglos and insulate themselves and their children from embarrassing or unpleasant confrontations with whites.⁴⁴

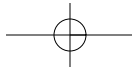
Attorney Charles S. Darden was a land-use specialist. Darden came from a prominent family in Wilson, North Carolina, where his father was the first undertaker of the city. Darden graduated from Howard University Law School in 1904. Before settling in Los Angeles, he made a grand tour of the mainland United States, the Hawaiian Islands, and Asia. One of the early black lawyers admitted to the California bar, and the first of his race to take a case before the Supreme Court of California, Darden

was the first African American lawyer to successfully challenge the legality of racially restrictive real estate covenants that appeared on deeds of sale. This 1915 court decision (*Benjamin Jones and Fannie Gautier v. Berlin Realty Company*) established a precedent, as it was the first decision obtained upon this question in a court of justice in the United States.⁴⁵

Another important precedent-establishing decision Darden won in California ensured that a married woman could sell community property without the consent of her husband, especially when the title to the property was vested solely in her name (*M. Randall v. Jane Washington and Samuel Washington*). Practicing law in California for many years, Darden, like other black lawyers, worked on civil and criminal appeals before the California Superior and Supreme courts. It was said Darden was a reserved man but socially popular. He was active with the Knights of Pythias, the Masons, and the Elks.⁴⁶

In addition to leading the effort to develop a resort and amusement facility in Santa Monica, Darden was also involved in a resort development plan for African Americans at Lake Elsinore in Riverside County. The Lake Elsinore project contracted with the young architect Paul R. Williams (1894–1980) to design plans for “Lake Shore Beach,” including landscaping, dining and dancing pavilions, a bath house, cottages, and a fifty-room hotel. By the late 1920s Williams would be the most prominent African American architect in the United States, a status he retained throughout his lifetime and in the years after his death. Williams became especially known for the luxury houses he designed for several Hollywood film industry and wealthy patrons, and his office-building designs.⁴⁷

Norman O. Houston was a second-generation Californian born in San Jose and raised in Oakland. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and was commissioned as a lieutenant in World War I. In 1925 he co-founded the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, which sold life and health insurance policies to blacks throughout California and, later, mortgage loans for homes and businesses of varying sizes. At its height, the Golden State became one of the largest African American-owned businesses in the United States. Although Houston’s professional life was mostly associated with the Golden State and his numerous civic activities, he was involved in other successful business ventures. Among them, he was a co-founder of black-owned Liberty



Building and Loan Association in 1924, and later in his career he was chairman of the Board of Directors of Broadway Federal Savings and Loan (a company founded in 1947 that is still in business today).⁴⁸

An article about the formation of the Santa Monica Bay Protective League in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 9, 1922, entitled “Caucasians Organize Protective League; Segregation of Races at Beaches Object of Santa Monica Body,” reported the slogan of the organization as, “A membership of 1,000 Caucasians.” The article went on to say the league was created to “eliminat[e] all objectionable features or anything that now is or will provide a menace to the bay district.” The *Times* account also included a statement that was issued at the time of the group’s election of officers:

Inasmuch as a certain negro syndicate has announced through the Los Angeles press their intention of making this bay district their beach and bringing thousands of negroes to the beach cities, which we believe would be very detrimental to our property values and our bay district as a whole, this organization will immediately take up this problem which in its opinion is of vital interest to all bay citizens. We believe that they should procure a beach of their own at a point separate and apart from all white beaches—which would eliminate all possible friction for all time to come. We invite any and all citizens to notify the secretary of any menace which needs the attention of this league.⁴⁹

On May 1, 1922, the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* reported that the Santa Monica City Council refused to amend zoning ordinance 211, passed in February 1922, which set aside the ocean frontage for residence property, to permit the construction of the resort. More than 400 citizens appeared at the council chambers the morning of May 1 to support the denial of the syndicate’s amusement development. In an earlier *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* article on April 19, 1922, covering the Ocean Frontage group’s petition request for the amendment of the ordinance so they could move forward with their development, the petitioner included an appeal to the council’s sense of fairness for all taxpaying citizens, even if they were black and used their own facilities separately from other citizens of the United States:

. . . that the colored citizens for whose benefit said improvements are to be primarily erected and constructed are without ocean frontage facilities and advantages such as bath houses, restaurants, dancing halls, and like amusements such as the abundantly owned, operated, maintained and con-

trolled for the use and benefit of other citizens of the United States in the city of Santa Monica.

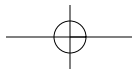
. . . the colored citizens for whose benefit said improvement are contemplated have been using the property purchased by your petitioner unmolested for the past ten or fifteen years and with absolute peace and freedom.⁵⁰

In a *California Eagle* editorial on May 6, 1922, titled, "Southern Red Neck Is Pumping Hot Air at Santa Monica: Endeavors To Stir Up Strife," the writer describes the text of a hand bill distributed under the name of a newspaper called the *Interpreter* in Santa Monica as unfairly playing to white racial prejudice toward blacks in order to stop the development of the ocean frontage amusement facilities. The editor expressed hope that the Santa Monica citizenry might be above this kind of negative race-baiting:

Santa Monica in its mad zeal to keep afloat is desperately grasping at straw[s] and has grasped hold of the zoning proposition at the beach town and playing to the prejudice of the citizens thereof; for what? Only to bring upon itself the just indignation of all of the good people of Santa Monica regardless of race, for they are not that sort of cattle down there. The officials there are high class gentlemen and would not for one minute stand for the whims of the cracker from Texas who, by the foulest methods possible seeks to stir up strife. The blatant [*sic*] misrepresentations in the vile sheet mentioned, comes not from any paper of standing but as aforesated from a [notoriously] sensational hand bill guided evidently by a red neck from the South.⁵¹

A *Los Angeles Times* newspaper article dated July 30, 1922, with the headline "Settlement of Negroes is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Blocks Plans for Colony of Colored Folk," noted, "[The Santa Monica Bay Protectively League] was instrumental in getting an ordinance passed by the . . . Santa Monica [authorities] denying permission for the construction of the negro bathhouse and amusement center." The same article also reported the cancellation of the sale of the ocean front property to the Ocean Frontage Syndicate by the owners.⁵²

Thus a move was apparent in the Ocean Park beach community by 1922 to bar African Americans from beach use, land development, and further home ownership. Anglo owners of large land tracts in the district who had recently subdivided several lots of beach frontage "placed a Caucasian restriction on their properties, barring Negroes from ownership or occupation." Major Santa Monica and West Los Angeles real estate developers Robert C. Gillis and Charles "Roy" Bundy and associates

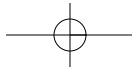


urged other property owners throughout the area to employ the “Caucasian clause” to prevent the leasing, occupancy, or sale of any property to persons not of the Caucasian origin.⁵³

Even though civil rights laws in California stated that it was illegal to discriminate against citizens in public places, which would have included the ocean front, legal sanctions and private harassment actions were initiated to discourage African Americans from visiting and settling in particular beach locales. A philosophy was also emerging among civic leaders that the beaches should be reserved for the white public, at least where African American land-development projects were concerned. During the 1920s several “save the beaches for the public” campaigns were implemented to keep African Americans from creating or maintaining beach resorts.⁵⁴

Similar cases to exclude African Americans occurred at other southern California beach towns in the 1920s. In 1925 the Los Angeles City Playground Association and the Title Guarantee and Trust Company obtained an injunction to prevent the Los Angeles City Council from leasing a section of city-owned El Segundo beach to an African American entrepreneur for “a beach park for the amusement of the Los Angeles African American community.” A newly formed Beach Playground Association, supported by the Los Angeles Realty Board, the Municipal League, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Advertising Club, worked to extend the injunction with an ordinance prohibiting future leasing of any recreational beach property to any private parties. They insisted that they were “not . . . against the colored or any other race, but . . . simply [wanted] to keep the municipally owned beaches open free to all the public, white and colored, and prevent them from being leased to private parties for gain and from being shut off by private parties from the public at large.”⁵⁵

Other beach resorts suffered similar fates. The Pacific Beach Club, a nearly completed African American beach resort in Huntington Beach, was burned down by arsonists in 1926. Bruce’s Beach, an African American resort in Manhattan Beach that had operated for twelve years, was taken by eminent domain to create a public park after harassment tactics by the Ku Klux Klan had failed to drive out African American residents and resort operators. When the city turned around in 1927 and leased it for a dollar a year to a private party who barred African Americans from the beach front site, the NAACP took legal action. The Manhattan Beach

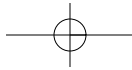


trustees revoked the lease, and the beach became free for all the public's enjoyment. Overt racial restrictions at public beaches began to fade away.⁵⁶

Many in the African American population of the 1920s and those who continued to migrate to the region prior to 1940 had middle-class resources to enjoy life and leisure in southern California. Despite the complex web of laws regulating housing, land ownership, labor, and marriage targeted at people of color, even in California, many middle-class blacks were drawn to the state for the same reasons as middle-class whites. White boosters, civic leaders, and politicians, viewing the beaches as the region's most important recreational and tourist asset, feared non-white private ownership of beach front property would make the beaches and beach-area property unattractive to white Americans.⁵⁷

Historian Lawrence Culver has observed that African American taxpayers "could stake a claim to the . . . recreational space that stood at the core of the [region's] civic life and identity made them seem more of a threat to white dominance than poorer migrants or immigrants."⁵⁸ While ethnic exoticism as tourist attractions was encouraged by Los Angeles boosters at Chinatown and Olvera Street as reminders of the romantic past or quaint relics of regional history and culture, and Spanish Revival architecture and Mexican performers were employed by tourist promoters as theme elements at many area resorts, African Americans did not fit into this booster agenda, as they were a reminder of the national racial tensions of the 1920s—Los Angeles was supposed to have transcended these types of tensions. Although the racial and ethnic mix of the Los Angeles region included whites of various European ethnicities, African Americans, Mexicans and Latinos, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos, along with California American Indians and Native Americans from other regions—systematized white racism in Los Angeles, when manifested in recreation space, was most consistently targeted at African Americans.⁵⁹

The Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles estimated in the 1920s that on summer weekends and holidays a quarter or more of the total population of the County of Los Angeles (500,000-plus people) would go to local beaches. Realizing that the beaches were also a primary tourist destination, various municipal and county governments policed and maintained beaches in southern California. In the 1920s local public authorities began purchasing and managing ocean front properties, to ensure public access, and urging voters to



support more beach front acquisitions. At this time segregation was imposed on African Americans at the beach, and they were forced to pay taxes to buy up coastal land that they would be prohibited from using through explicit ordinance or by custom.⁶⁰

FOND REMEMBRANCES OF THE "INKWELL"

In spite of these unpleasant events in the 1920s, many African Americans from Santa Monica, Venice, and Greater Los Angeles walked, rode the Pacific Electric trolley lines, or drove their cars to this wonderful site in the Ocean Park section of Santa Monica to enjoy the sun and surf.

In an interview, Novellette Tabor Bailey (a niece of Arthur L. Reese, the African American who worked with developer Abbott Kinney in his Venice amusement enterprise discussed earlier), expressed fond memories of going to the beach. Now in her nineties and living in the family home in Venice, Mrs. Bailey recalls fun occasions at parties in Santa Monica and at visits to the Inkwel when she was a blossoming young woman. With a girlish grin and the voice of a woman who has enjoyed her life, she reminisced, "We would go up to the beach in Santa Monica so we could meet the L.A. boys." A retired Douglas Aircraft employee and nurse, she also remembers with great affection being in an Easter program at Phillips Chapel Church when she was four years old.⁶¹

As a UCLA student, Ralph Bunche, the renowned diplomat, civic rights advocate, and 1950 Nobel Peace Prize winner, would come to the African American section of the beach in Ocean Park in the 1920s. He and his friends would stop by to visit the Stout family. Rev. James A. Stout was the first minister of Phillips Chapel.⁶²

In an interview long-time Los Angeles resident Wallace Decuir, a retired Los Angeles city fireman and businessman, recalled of the Inkwel, "We would say we had the best part of the beach." On a beautiful summer day in the 1930s, when Decuir was a youth, he and his friends would sometimes ride their bicycles from central Los Angeles to the beach near the end of Pico Boulevard to take pleasure in the summer day and meet other friends. While at this Ocean Park section of the City of Santa Monica, he remembers stopping for hot dogs at the Blue Bird hot dog stand. He also has a keen memory of the itchy wool bathing suit he wore.⁶³

Decuir and all the people I interviewed regarding the Inkwel remember having great times there during the summer, especially at the Inde-

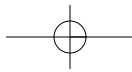


Ralph Bunche and friends at the segregated blacks-only section of the Santa Monica beach known as the "Inkwell," ca. 1923.
Los Angeles Public Library/Shades of L.A. collection.

pendence and Labor Day holidays. Even though African Americans were confined to one section of the beach, they enjoyed the outlet.⁶⁴

Los Angeles native Prince Cobbs, a retired corrections officer now living in Las Vegas, found the Inkwell a release of another kind. When he was a young adult he would ride the streetcar to the beach when he needed to get away to think about things. Decuir remembers that when he was young, in the 1940s, one could take either the bus or the red car trolley line for less than twenty cents to get to Venice or Santa Monica beaches.⁶⁵

Various social clubs, church groups, and extended families held picnics at the Inkwell. After returning from military service in World War II, Decuir, Ivan J. Houston (see above, page 155), and several of their childhood friends formed the Cosmos Club in 1946. The organization still exists today as a social group with a business networking and civic disposition. In the late 1940s the club threw big picnics at the Inkwell and in Val Verde (an African American recreation and vacation area near Canyon Country in northwest Los Angeles County) and dances at various venues around Los Angeles. They started the club to welcome home



their friends who were getting discharged from the armed services. Decuir said, "The world and Los Angeles had changed so much for us during the war. When we returned home, we were strangers in our own home town." Sixty-plus years later, the Cosmos Club's surviving members now throw only one gala social event a year.⁶⁶

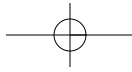
Los Angeles native Marilyn Hudson, the daughter of the late architect Paul Revere Williams, shared with me that she and friends in the 1940s started a group they called "The Beach Club" at the Inkwell. The club still gathers today for fun at the shore, though not at the Inkwell anymore. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Synanon (a substance-abuse rehabilitation center) took over the nearby Casa del Mar complex, the atmosphere of the whole vicinity changed. Hudson's Beach Club moved its activities south to a beach at Marina del Rey.⁶⁷

THE PLACE SOMETIMES KNOWN AS THE "INKWELL": TODAY

In 2000, after Synanon closed, the Casa del Mar was restored as an elegant beach front hotel. The hotel site is now included in the Santa Monica landmark list, the California Register of Historic Places, and the National Register of Historic Places. The park and the arcade south of the hotel have not changed much. The beach area once called the Inkwell is now partially taken up by a parking lot. In general the location continues to have its charming character and defining vistas featuring the Santa Monica Pier, the bluff, the Pacific coastline, the park and arcade, the ocean and the "Del" (Casa del Mar).

This section of Santa Monica Beach is no longer referred to by anyone as the "Inkwell." I would venture to say most people today who visit this stretch of Santa Monica Beach have no idea, until the recent commemorative plaque was put in place, that this section was once a segregated beach where African Americans could enjoy the sunny California seashore. The most significant changes to the area are that the shore line has been changed to protect against erosion, the hotel fence dividing black beachgoers from white beach club members no longer exists, and people from all walks of life now enjoy "the best part of the beach."

Changes in social customs, tastes in leisure activities, and new transportation infrastructure over the course of the twentieth century have created many more opportunities for all people, especially African Americans, to enjoy a greater variety of recreational spaces at beaches and otherwise, near and far.



“THE INKWELL”

A Place of Celebration and Pain

The beach near this site between Bay and Bicknell Streets, known by some as “the Inkwell,” was an important gathering place for African Americans long after racial restrictions on public beaches were abandoned in 1927.

African American groups from Santa Monica, Venice, and Los Angeles, as early as the 1920s to the end of the Jim Crow era in the 1950s, preferred to enjoy the sun and surf here because they encountered less racial harassment than at other Southland beaches.

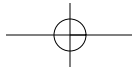
In the 1940s, Nick Gabaldon, a Santa Monica High School student and the first documented black surfer, taught himself how to surf here.

Plaque Text

EPILOGUE

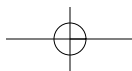
African American beachgoers at the Inkwell and Nick Gabaldon (1927–1951), the Santa Monica resident who is thought to be the first surfer of African American and Mexican descent, were honored on February 7, 2008, with the installation of a commemorative marker at Bay Street and Ocean Front Walk. I had the honor of creating the text on the plaque marker and of serving as a guest speaker at the unveiling ceremony. This marker will touch many people’s lives as they come to enjoy the beach at this site. The plaque’s text tells an American pioneer story about African Americans who, in spite of challenges, took agency to participate in the fruits of California. The American stories told about the Inkwell and surfer Nick Gabaldon on this plaque will be infused into the collective memory of local and national public culture.

In the celebration of American, California, and Santa Monica heritage, let us embrace the complicated layers of our national, regional, and local heritage and renew our sense of community pride and identity. As in the case of the Inkwell, when there is a lack of tangible material culture in the form of buildings to landmark in recognition of a group’s legacy, let us as citizens continue to find ways to memorialize marginalized groups and their heritage in the City of Santa Monica and beyond.

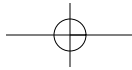


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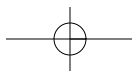
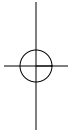
- ¹ Ivan J. Houston, Los Angeles resident and former head of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co., telephone interview by author, November 2004, Los Angeles; Ivan J. Houston is one of the sons of Norman O. Houston, one of the founders of the Golden State who will be discussed later in this article.
- ² I first became aware of an African American historical relationship with the Santa Monica Bay area while doing research for a paper on segregated resorts and recreation areas in southern California as part of my graduate school course work with historian Kevin Starr in 2004. Cathy Naro, "A Page From History, How Green Was My Valley: Southland African Americans Remember Hayrides and Golf Games in Val Verde," *Westways*, February 1995, 71.
- ³ Douglas Flammig, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 274; Dan Cady, *Southern California: White Southern Migrants in Greater Los Angeles, 1920-1930* (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 2005), 198-99; "Swimming Pool Suit Dismissed, Negroes Advised to Seek Injunction Against Rule for Colored Bathers," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1922: ProQuest; and Milton Lawrence Culver, *Island, the Oasis, and the City: Santa Catalina, Palm Springs, Los Angeles, and Southern California's Shaping of American Life and Leisure* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), 335-43.
- ⁴ Flammig, 351, 367, 369, 373 and Lawrence DeGraaf, "African American Suburbanization in California, 1960 through 1990," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, ed. Lawrence DeGraaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2001), 336-37, 415, 441; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 100, 415.
- ⁵ Naro, *Westways*, February 1995, 71.
- ⁶ Title Guarantee and Trust Company, *Santa Monica* (Los Angeles, 1935), n.p.; Marvin J. Wolf and Katherine Mader, *Santa Monica: Jewel of the Sunset Bay* (Chatsworth, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989), 33; Ernest Marquez, *Port Los Angeles: A Phenomenon of the Railroad Era* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1975), 113; Fred E. Basten, *Paradise by the Sea: Santa Monica Bay* (Los Angeles: General Publishing Company, 1997), 59.
- ⁷ City of Santa Monica, "Historic Preservation Element, Final Draft," Prepared by PCR Services Corp. and Historic Resources Group, December 2001, 11-12; Wolf, 42-43; and Luther A. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History: Santa Monica Bay Cities: 1542 to 1908* (Los Angeles, 1908), 252.
- ⁸ "Historic District Application," V2, 20-21; and "Things to do in LA: LaBrea Tar Pits, <http://www.laokay.com/halac/RanchoLaBrea.htm>.
- ⁹ "Historic District Application," V2, 21, 23-24; Wolf, 20-21.
- ¹⁰ "Historic District Application," V2, 27-30; Basten, *Paradise by the Sea*, 52, 59; and Scott, 65.
- ¹¹ "Historic District Application," V1, 3 and Scott, 50-53.
- ¹² Paula Scott, *Santa Monica: A History on the Edge* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 7, 47, 50-51; Walter Nugent, *Into The West: The Story of Its People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 212; Othal Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the C.M.E. Church* (Memphis, TN: CME Publishing House, 1985), 349; "Historic District Application For Third Street Neighborhood in Ocean Park, Santa Monica, California," Prepared by The Third Street Neighbors, 1990, Vol. 1, 3; 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930 U.S. Federal Census [database on-line], www.ancestry.com, 6 June 2008. One result of the author's earlier research on African American leisure sites and on a boarder interpretation of the citizens who contributed to the region's development was the designation of the historic Phillips Chapel CME Church as a landmark by the City of Santa Monica Landmarks Commission in 2005. The criterion for designation was based on the cultural significance of the site, not on the building's architectural aesthetic.
- ¹³ Scott, 7, 47, 50-51; Lakey, 349; "Historic District Application For Third Street Neighborhood in Ocean Park, Santa Monica California," Prepared by The Third Street Neighbors, 1990, V2, 3; City of Santa Monica, "Historic Resources Inventory Sheet for Phillips Chapel," Prepared by Leslie Heumann, 1992; and James W. Lungsford, *Looking at Santa Monica: The Ocean, The Sunset, the Hills and the Clouds* (Santa Monica, CA: 1993), 39.
- ¹⁴ 1910, 1920 and 1930 U.S. Federal Manuscript Census [database on-line], www.ancestry.com, 6 June 2008.
- ¹⁵ 1920 and 1930 U.S. Federal Census [database on-line], www.ancestry.com, 6 June 2008 and Robert L. Leake,

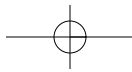


- "The History of Calvary Baptist Church," Prepared for Calvary Baptist Church Men & Women's Day Program, Santa Monica, California, 28 October 2001.
- ¹⁶ James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, *California: An Interpretive History* (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1973; reprint 2003), xiii; Scott, 7, 47; and Nugent, 212. The Jim Crow laws and customs that relegated African Americans to the status of second-class citizens operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Segregation of the races was mandated, leading to treatment and accommodations for black Americans that were usually inferior to those provided for white Americans, and institutionalizing many economic, educational, and social disadvantages. In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court declared state-sponsored school segregation unconstitutional. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 for the most part overruled the last remaining Jim Crow laws.
- ¹⁷ Smith, *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975.
- ¹⁸ Walter L. Gordon, Esq., Collection/William Beverly Collection, University of Southern California Special Collections and *The Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who 1930-1931* (Los Angeles: California Eagle Publishing Company, 1931), 79.
- ¹⁹ Santa Monica Historic Society, Oral History Program: Interview with Donald Augusta Brunson, interviewed by Barbara Wurf, February 23, 1991, 1-5.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-5, and Ernest Marquez, *Santa Monica Beach: A Collector's Pictorial History* (Santa Monica, CA: Angel City Press, 2004), 104, 108.
- ²¹ Wurf, 1-5.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ John Tabor, Las Vegas resident/retired Venice, CA, businessman, telephone interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles, and Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8B; Russell Snyder, "Centenarian generous slice of Americana revisited," *Daily Breeze*, 6 November 1983, B1-3; and U.S. Census.
- ²⁵ Alexander, Carolyn Elayne, *Abbott Kinney's Venice-of-America, The Golden Years: 1905-1920*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Westside Genealogical Society, 1991), 215.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-5.
- ²⁷ Lonnie Bunch, "The Great State for the Negro," in *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans In California*, eds. Lawrence De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor (Seattle and London: Autry Museum of Western Heritage and University of Washington Press, 2001), 142-43; Flammig, 4; and Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B.
- ²⁸ U.S. Census and Basten, 99.
- ²⁹ Bunch, "The Great State for the Negro," 138 and Scott, 55-56.
- ³⁰ Basten, 99; Marquez, 169, 172, 174-80; Scott, 62; Flammig, 271-72; "Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House, Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922; and U.S. Census.
- ³¹ Marquez, 57-58; Basten, 99.
- ³² Marquez, 58.
- ³³ Flammig, 183-84, 202-204, 272, 275; "The Valentine Case On Trail," *California Eagle*, 11 March 1922; "Law Delays the Valentine Case," *California Eagle*, 22 April 1922; "The Valentine Case," *California Eagle*, Editorial Section, 13 May 1922; "Special Policemen and Colored Deputy Sheriff Lock Horns Up in Topanga Canyon Over Bagatelle," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 1 June 1920; and "Suspension of Deputy Sheriff Cooper Comes As Aftermath of Recent Fight in Topanga Canyon," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 11 June 1920.
- ³⁴ Jill Nelson, *Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans At Home on an Island* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 131.
- ³⁵ La Bonita continued to service African Americans visiting the beach front in the 1910s through the early 1950s. Flammig, 272; Lloyd Allen, retired Santa Monica businessman and civic activist, telephone interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles; and Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B.
- ³⁶ Marquez, 174.
- ³⁷ Smith, *Evening Outlook*, 17 May 1975, 8B.
- ³⁸ *California Eagle*, 27 June 1930, 2.



- ³⁹ Flammig, 272; "Caucasians Organize Protective League," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1922: ProQuest, 14; and "Fight Against Beach Dance Halls Success," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1922: ProQuest.
- ⁴⁰ Flammig, 272; and Hugh McBeth, "An Open Letter to the Los Angeles Forum," *California Eagle*, 5 August 1922, 8.
- ⁴¹ Andrew W. Kahrl, "The Slightest Semblance of Unruliness: Steamboat Excursions, Pleasure Resorts, and the Emergence of Segregation Culture on the Potomac River," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 26, <http://www.historycooperative.org/libproxy.usc.edu/journals/jah/94.4/kahrl.html>, 9 April 2008.
- ⁴² The Ocean Frontage Syndicate is also referred to as the Ocean Front Investment Group in some sources. "Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922: ProQuest; "The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice," *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; "Amusement Center for Negro Visitors," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April 1922: ProQuest; "Reopen Hearing: Project of Negro Amusement Center Urged at Santa Monica," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1922: ProQuest; and "Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House, Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922.
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- ⁴⁴ Mark Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890–1945," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 131, 135.
- ⁴⁵ Beasley, Delilah, *Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Fairfield, CA: John Stevenson Publisher, reprint 2004), 197–200.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844–1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 485–86.
- ⁴⁷ Lake Shore Beach Company, Board of Directors meeting minutes, Arthur L. Reese Family Archives, Los Angeles, Sept. 1921–1930s; Richard Bardolph, *The Negro Vanguard* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1959), 191; and Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*, with foreword by David Gebhard (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1993), 22.
- ⁴⁸ Flammig, 255–58; *Who's Who In California: California Negro Directory, 1942–1943* (Los Angeles: California Eagle Publishing Company), 215; *Los Angeles Negro Directory and Who's Who, 1930–1931* (Los Angeles: California Eagle Publishing Company), 93; and *The Negro Who's Who In California* (Negro Who's Who In California, 1949), 54, 59.
- ⁴⁹ "Caucasians Organize Protective League, Segregation of Races at Beaches Object of Santa Monica Body," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1922: ProQuest.
- ⁵⁰ "The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice," *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; "Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House: Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922; and "Council Denies Petition for Negro Bath House: S.M. Council Refuses Plea When 400 Citizen Appear to Protest Change In Law," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 1 May 1922.
- ⁵¹ "Southern Red Neck Is Pumping Hot Air at Santa Monica: Endeavors to Stir Up Strife," *California Eagle* newspaper, 6 May 1922.
- ⁵² "Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922: ProQuest; "The Color Line At Santa Monica: Blacks Again Feel Iron Fist of Race Prejudice," *California Eagle*, 1 April 1922; "Negroes Ask Zone Change to Build S.M. Bath House: Syndicate Asks Council to Amend Ordinance to Permit Amusement Resort on Beach," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, 19 April 1922. The parcel identified as "Pico Boulevard on the northwest in Lot 44 of Vicente Terrace," where the luxury Shutters Hotel on the Beach is sited today, was north of what would become the Club Del Mar in 1924. Assessor's Parcel Map, County of Los Angeles; and Sanborn Maps.
- ⁵³ Flammig, 272–73; and "Settlement of Negroes Is Opposed: Santa Monica and Ocean Park Block Plans for Colony of Colored Folks," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1922: ProQuest.
- ⁵⁴ Cady, 194–99; Robert L. Brigham, "Landownership and Occupancy By Negroes In Manhattan Beach" (mas-





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- ⁵⁵ Cady, 195-98; Robert L. Brigham, "Landownership and Occupancy by Negroes in Manhattan Beach" (master's thesis, Fresno State University, 1956), 31-34; and "Beach Suit Depending on Voters: Continuance Granted Until after Election, as Changes May Settle Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1925: ProQuest.
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- ⁵⁷ Culver, 331-34; Brigham, 33; and Flammig, 8, 45-46, 49.
- ⁵⁸ Culver, 331-34.
- ⁵⁹ Culver, 334-35, 339.
- ⁶⁰ Brigham, 33; and Culver, 334, 338-40.
- ⁶¹ Novellette Tabor Bailey, retired Douglas Aircraft employee and nurse, telephone interview by author, April 2005, Los Angeles.
- ⁶² Cristyne Lawson, retired dean of Dance Education, California College for the Arts. Interview by author, February 2006, Santa Monica, California.
- ⁶³ Wallace Decuir, Los Angeles resident, retired fireman and businessman, telephone interview by author, 1 November 2004, Los Angeles.
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- ⁶⁵ Prince Cobbs, Las Vegas resident and retired law enforcement officer, telephone interview by author, 27 October 2004, Los Angeles; and Decuir, interview by author, 1 November 2004.
- ⁶⁶ Decuir, Interview by author, 1 November 2004.
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