

MAR VISTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Meeting Minutes -July 23, 2005

ATTENDANCE: Glen and Nancy Howell, Hal and Cicely Golden, Marie Wallace, Nadine Gallegos, guests Ken Marsh, Pauline Dennis

HOST: Glen and Nancy Howell

PRESIDING: Glen Howell

- Glen introduced next door neighbor, Pauline Dennis (born 1920) a longtime resident of the neighborhood and a lifelong visitor to Venice and Mar Vista. Pauline shared memories of celery fields, orchids and canals.
- Glen Howell then continued with history and tales of the Venice canals both Abbot Kinney north of Venice Blvd and Sherman and Howland on the canals which remain, south of Venice. Glen handed out a "Venice Quiz" from the Venice BeachHead. The attendees gave some interesting answers to the questions. None knew when Aimee Semple McPherson disappeared from Venice Beach. Glen has graciously given us a written summary of his remarks, and they are included in these minutes.
- Ken Marsh, in Dorothy Nichols absence, reported on the progress being made for preservation of the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments.
- There will be no meeting in August.
- **Next Meeting: Thursday, September 15, 2005, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**
- Host: Glen and Nancy Howell, 12607 Rose Avenue, Mar Vista.
- The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Nadine Gallegos

Recording Secretary, Pro Tem

VENICE CANALS

The story of the Venice canals is complex. There are many ways to view why all of Abbott Kinney's canals are today streets. What about the canals south of Venice Blvd.? Why weren't they filled in? Why was the city of Venice annexed to Los Angeles? Did it have anything to do with the canals.?

These and other questions about the history of Venice have answers that would surprise many Venetians. Part of the reason is the tendency to look for easy answers. Let's start with the question; Did Abbot Kinney build all of the canals of Venice? The answer is no.

When Abbot Kinney died in 1920, there were 13 canals in the City of Venice. Seven of them were built by Kinney as part of his Venice of America. These canals were all located north of Venice Blvd. Six canals located south of Venice Blvd. were built by a syndicate called the Short Line Beach Company, whose officers included Moses Sherman, Fred Howland and Carroll Daly. The names of the City of Venice canals were:

1. Grand Canal (Grand Ave.)
2. Lion Canal (Windward Ave.)
3. Coral Canal (Main St.)
4. Altair Canal (Altair Pl.)
5. Cabrillo Canal (Cabrillo Ave.)
6. Aldebaran Canal (Market St.)
7. Venus Canal (San Juan Ave.)
8. Carroll Canal
9. Linnie Canal
 10. Howland Canal
 11. Sherman Canal
 13. Grand Canal

Before the Venice of America Canals were filled to make streets, there were two Grand Canals, one in Kinney's development and one in the Short Line Beach development. The only canals that exist in Venice today are the canals south of Venice Blvd. In 1904, a year before Venice of America opened, the City of Ocean Park was incorporated. Venice of America was a development in Ocean Park. In 1902, three years before the opening of Venice of America, Moses Sherman and his Los Angeles and Pacific Railroad completed a line from Los Angeles to Ocean Park. The rail line later became Venice Blvd. The Short Line Beach Company owned beach land just south of the LAP rail line. LAP called this line the Palms Division. In 1911, when Pacific Electric bought out Sherman and LAP, the line was called the PE Venice Short Line. The LAP green cars were replaced by the PE Red cars.

The Short Line Beach's housing development, with Holland like canals, was named New Amsterdam. The Venice of America canals were eventually connected to Short Line Beach canals. In 1911, the name of the city Ocean Park was changed to city of Venice. Venice of America was now in the city of Venice. The Ocean Park City Hall, built in 1907, on Venice Blvd., became the City Hall of Venice. Abbot Kinney's canals and Moses Sherman's canals were both in the City of Venice.

Abbot Kinney established a company to own and control his properties. The Kinney Company owned the canals north of Venice Blvd. The canals south of Venice Blvd. were owned by the Short Line Beach Company. In 1912, the Kinney Company deeded the Venice of America canals to the City of Venice, with a deed restriction that stated the canals would remain canals, or the property would revert back to the Kinney Company. The canals south of Venice Blvd. were also deeded to the City of Venice. Both the north and south canals suffered the same problems. They caved in, and became a health hazard due to contamination and mosquitoes. Raw sewage was dumped into the canals and they did not flush properly to the sea. During heavy rains they flooded. The mounting problems with the canals was the reason the Kinney Company decided to deed their canals to the City of Venice.

The citizens of Venice had another major problem, drinking water. The Kinney Company owned the Venice Consumers Water Company. As throngs of people came to Venice to live and play, the water level in the wells dropped below sea level. When this occurred salt water intruded into the wells. By 1913, the City of Los Angeles had an abundant supply of high quality water. This water was only available to people within the city limits of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was not allowed to sell its water to other communities. In the 1920's, annexation to Los Angeles became an option voted on by numerous communities that were concerned about future growth and an adequate water supply. The Kinney Company was having significant financial problems after Abbot Kinney's death. A decision was made by the company to sell the water company to private investors. The investors that bought the Venice water company also bought a water company located to the east of Venice, the Ocean Park Heights Water Company. Being farther away from the ocean the Ocean Park Heights Water Company wells were not susceptible to salt water intrusion. The two water companies were merged with the water source being Mar Vista wells.

The City of Santa Monica was also concerned about drinking water. Their wells were proving inadequate to provide sufficient good quality water to their growing population. Santa Monica citizens came close to voting for annexation to Los Angeles to solve their water problems. Santa Monica had a municipal water district. The city hired an engineering consulting firm to study the Santa Monica water works and recommend additional locations for wells close to the city. The consulting firm recommended that Santa Monica buy land in Ocean Park Heights (Mar Vista) over the Charnock basin. The success of the Charnock Wells drilled by the City of Santa Monica was a major factor in the voters deciding by a narrow margin, to reject annexation. Until recently the Charnock Wells in Mar Vista have been the major portion of Santa Monica's drinking water. In 1924, Santa Monica purchased for their wells, the land that is now leased to Windward School for athletic fields.

The investors who bought and merged the Venice and Mar Vista water companies, saw how productive the new Santa Monica wells were so they too, decided to buy land in Mar Vista to drill into the same Charnock Basin aquifer. Unfortunately their experience in drilling shallow wells in Venice did not prepare them to drill a deep well through layers of gravel, sand and clay. Their first Charnock well failed. Their second well was successful, but by then they had used up the capital they had borrowed, and did not think they could borrow more so

decided to sell. In 1928, they sold to a private water company, the Southern California Water Company.

Annexation to Los Angeles was an option for the citizens of Venice, with water being a major problem. In 1927, the citizens of Venice voted for annexation. Soon cool clear water from the Owens Valley began flowing into the pipes in Venice.

Another major problem in Venice was the deteriorating canals. The business people of Venice said that the only way Venice of America could survive was to fill in the canals. Transportation in and out of Venice was very difficult. Making the canals into streets would solve the transportation problem. Most citizens living on the canals also favored filling in the canals. The Kinney Company deed restriction had to be dealt with. They finally agreed to allow some canals to be filled in, but for sentimental reasons, wanted not to fill in all the canals. The canals would probably have been filled in by the City of Venice before it was annexed to Los Angeles had the Kinney Company initially agreed to fill in all the canals.

As the Kinney Company had nothing to do with the south canals, these canals could have been filled in whenever the homeowners agreed. Money however was a significant problem for the less affluent people living on the south canals. The first canals filled in after Venice became part of Los Angeles were the north canals, where the business part of Venice was located. The south canals were residential only. Another reason that the south canals did not get filled in was the Great Depression. This only added to the financial difficulty of financing the filling in of the remaining Venice canals. Citizens in Venice of America paid an assessment to the City of Los Angeles for filling in the canals. Venetians had decided to fill in their canals before they were annexed. The people living on the south canals wanted their canals either fixed or filled in, but they were living on the wrong side of the tracks.

Ironically the City of Los Angeles many years later fixed the south canals, making this area, once on the wrong side of the tracks, one of the most desirable places to live in Venice today.

Glen Howell
7/4/05