

The Historic Black Enclave of Bruce's Beach

Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. and Willie (Willa) A. Bruce

Mrs. Willa A. Bruce purchased Lot 8 of Block 5 on the Strand in Peck's Manhattan Beach Tract in 1912. With her husband, Charles, Willa opened Bruce's Beach on June 17, 1912, a seaside resort for bathing and fishing. It started as a small portable cottage with a stand that sold soda pop and lunches. Guests could rent bathing suits, access showers and dressing tents. While Charles worked on the train, Willa ran the business. As hundreds of guests visited the resort, other Black families purchased property in this section of Manhattan Beach, creating a diverse summer community.

Mrs. Mary R. Sanders (Washington)

On September 15, 1923, Mrs. Mary Sanders (not pictured) bought Lot 6, Block 12. Mrs. Sanders was born 1872 in Canada and immigrated to the United States in 1887. She worked as a caterer for private families and was described as "a woman of considerable success and prestige."

Ms. Elizabeth (Emma) M. Patterson

The other half of the Prioleau lot was purchased by Ms. Elizabeth M. Patterson in 1922. Ms. Patterson was born in Tennessee in 1877, and was a longtime friend of the Prioleau family from when they lived in Kansas. Together, Ms. Patterson and the Prioleaus built a duplex on their lots. This duplex still exists in a different location today in Manhattan Beach.

Major Reverend George W. and Mrs. Ethel Prioleau

In 1919, the Prioleaus purchased the southern half of Lot 4, Block 12. During the Spanish-American War, Maj. Rev. Prioleau served with the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry. During her husband's military service, Ethel taught classes for army officers' wives. Maj. Rev. Prioleau challenged hypocrisy of fighting a war for liberation in Cuba while the United States was locked in the mindset of racism and segregation. He moved to Los Angeles following his retirement and founded the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Ethel graduated from Normal Teacher Training College in Kansas. After her children were barred from accessing the swimming pool in Exposition Park, she successfully sued the city of Los Angeles, resulting in the desegregation of city pools.

Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna E. Johnson

Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. and Anna Johnson (not pictured) purchased Lot 1, Block 12 in 1923. Milton B. Johnson was born in Canada and came to the United States in 1874. He married Anna E. Davis on October 27, 1914. Milton worked as a porter for the railroad.

Mr. and Mrs. James and Lula Slaughter

The Slaughter family moved to Manhattan Beach during the eminent domain proceedings, purchasing property to the south of the condemned area. In May 1927, the same month that the Bruces' resort closed, the Slaughters opened a 10 - room boarding house. They lived in Manhattan Beach year-round with their seven children.