

This plaque would be two-sided and replace the existing one on Highland Avenue. The second side would have a map detailing where each property was located for visitors to see how the area was laid out and whose property was where. Each QR code will link to more information, as well as photographs and full newspaper articles.

The Historic Black Enclave of Bruce's Beach

Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. and Willie "Willa" A. Bruce

Mrs. Willie "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 that sold soda pop and lunches. Guests could rent bathing suits, access showers and dressing tents. While Charles worked as a chef 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. *For the history of the Bruce Resort, please see the plaque located on the strand. [QR CODE 8 – Page 18]*

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 the 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.

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.

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.

Other Property Owners

The remaining 25 lots of land in those two blocks were owned by White property owners. Fourteen of the lots were owned by investors B.H. Dyer, R.L. Rice, and H.M. Eichelberger and were never developed.

The other lots owned by White property owners were: C.W. Stone - Lot 3, Block 5; George W. Yarrow - Lots 4 and 6, Block 5 and Lot 11, Block 12; Lillie D. Dosta - Lot 7, Block 5; Sarah I. Ambrose, Marion R. Wyser (Southern California Bond & Finance Company) - Lot 7, Block 12; R.C. Rupert Lot 10, Block 12; Grace R Stuart- Lot 13, Block 12; L.A. Dreisbach (M.W. Mitchell) - Lot 14, Block 12; Clara M. Monroe - Lot 15, Block 12; and H.A. Eccleston - Lot 16, Block 12. By 1924, none of them had been developed, nor were there any indications of development plans by 1929.

Harassment Protested by the NAACP [QR CODE 10 – Page 33]

Despite the condemnation proceedings and ongoing harassment from White residents, Black beachgoers continued to visit Manhattan Beach. In May 1927, the Manhattan Beach Board of Trustees leased the entire beach between 16th and 19th Streets, and later all of 25th Street, to local businessman, Oscar C. Bessonette. Now considered private property, unwanted visitors to the beach could be subject to arrest.

On July 4, 1927, a 19-year-old Black UCLA student, Elizabeth Catley, was arrested by Manhattan Beach Police for “trespassing” on the “private beach.” According to the *Times*, she was held in the Redondo Beach jail for hours wearing only her bathing suit.

On July 17, the NAACP organized a peaceful protest led by Los Angeles chapter President Dr. Henry Claude Hudson, Manhattan Beach resident John McCaskill, J.H. Conley and Romalious Johnson. The men were arrested for resisting an officer and taken to jail. During their August trial, Bessonette admitted under oath that the intention of the “no trespassing” signs was to keep “undesirables” -- which he defined as “colored people” -- off the beach.

The court found the defendants guilty. But the men appealed to the Superior Court of Los Angeles, and their attorney Hugh E. Macbeth moved for “an arrest of judgement in the Manhattan court.” This request was granted, and the City Council canceled its lease with Bessonette, thereby opening the beaches to all.

The next day, *The California Eagle* proudly declared: “NAACP Wins Beach Victory.” In a telegram to the national branch of the NAACP printed in *The Chicago Defender*, Dr. Hudson, Los Angeles branch president, proclaimed: “Manhattan Beach fight won. Only 45 days from the first intimidation of Colored citizens in Manhattan to complete victory by [the] Los Angeles branch.”

The NAACP’s actions and the court’s decision set a precedent that would forever discourage “private exploitation” of the Manhattan beachfront. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, this would forbid the erection of any building or barrier that would obstruct any citizens at any time. It reported: “The beach is open only for public playground.”

The “Race War” of 1928 [QR CODE 11]

On the night of October 18, 1927, “hooded” individuals allegedly approached the Slaughter residence and set the gas meter aflame. Awakened by smoke, the Slaughters extinguished the fire. *The California Eagle* reported that “there are individuals who are...endeavoring to terrorize and instill fear into the hearts of Colored residents of Manhattan Beach.”

In February 1928, Los Angeles newspaper *The Record*, reported an announcement by chief detective of the Los Angeles district attorney’s office, George Contreras, of an investigation into the “burning and dynamiting of the home of negro residents of Manhattan Beach, which has grown to the proportion of a race war.” *The Venice Evening Vanguard* stated that “the anti-negro forces have tried to keep the town white by even buying out colored holdings at more than their true value, but in vain. Failing in peaceful means, harsher measures apparently have been resorted to in order to gain their ends, say the investigators.”

The 1928 Grand Jury did not pursue any formal indictments, and according to the *Times*, more evidence was requested. No witnesses were called in the investigation.

The Bruce Legacy of the Park [QR CODE 12]

Although development plans were documented, accounts vary as to how much progress was made in the construction of the public park. From 1928 until 1962, the area was referred to as City Park or Beach Front Park, and following a contest hosted by the Kiwanis Club in 1962, it was officially designated Bayview Terrace Park. As a goodwill gesture to the Sister City Program, the park was renamed Parque Culiacan in 1974.

In 2005, Manhattan Beach resident and activist Patrick McBride requested re-naming the park to reflect its history related to civil rights. Manhattan Beach Parks and Recreation Commission agreed. After passionate public comment from community members, the park was officially named Bruce's Beach and dedicated on Saturday, March 31, 2007. Willie "Willa" and Charles's grandson, Bernard Bruce told the crowd: "This is a happy day for my family and me. It is a happy day for Southern California, for African Americans, for the whole country. We are remembering our past."