

*This is the wording for the plaque that would go on the Strand at the exact location of Bruce's Beach. It focuses solely on the Bruces. Additional information about the other property owners is on the second plaque that would be on Highland Ave. This would replace the existing plaque. Each QR code will link to more information found in the History Report, as well as photographs and /or full newspaper articles.*

## **The History of Bruce's Beach**

### **Willa Bruce – A Pioneering Entrepreneur**

In February 1912, Willie “Willa” Ann Bruce (b. 1862, Missouri) purchased a lot on the Strand in Manhattan Beach, determined to create a destination where Black Angelinos could relax and enjoy the ocean. **[QR CODE 1 – Page 17]** During the time of Jim Crow-era exclusionary real estate practices, Willa proclaimed to the *Los Angeles Times*, “Wherever we have tried to buy land for a beach resort we have been refused. But I own this land and I’m going to keep it.”

While her husband Charles Aaron Bruce (b. 1860, District of Columbia) worked as a dining car chef on the train between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, Mrs. Bruce ran the business. It officially opened on June 17, 1912, with a small portable cottage that rented bathing suits, offered changing rooms, and sold refreshments to the beachgoing public. Notably, it was one of the few places along the Pacific Coast where Black beachgoers could access such amenities.

### **Increased Popularity Creates Increased Opposition**

Harassment of the Bruces and their guests by some White neighbors occurred immediately after the resort opened. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “No Trespassing” signs were posted in front of the Bruces’ resort on a strip of beach owned by subdivider George Peck, where visitors were “confronted by two deputy constables who warned them against crossing the strip of land in front of Mrs. Bruce’s property to reach the ocean.” Black beachgoers walked a half mile around the prohibited area and “frolicked in the breakers” nonetheless. **[QR CODE 2 – Page 19]**

The popularity of the Bruces’ resort increased, drawing hundreds – and, at times, thousands – of Black visitors to the area. By the summer of 1916, the Bruces’ replaced their portable cottage with a two-story structure that included changing rooms, a dance hall, and restaurant. Encouraged by the Bruces’ success, other Black families purchased land in the surrounding area and built cottages and vacation homes, creating a summer community for Black Angelinos.

With the influx of Black landowners, some White citizens were concerned that this “Negro invasion” would negatively affect their property values. To protect their interests, they petitioned the Board of Trustees in November 1923 to condemn the land, with the oblique intention of thwarting the Bruces’ business and driving the Black community out of the City.

In 1924, the Board of Trustees passed Ordinance No. 282, which ordered the acquisition by condemnation of Blocks 5 and 12 in Peck’s Manhattan Beach with the stated intention of creating a public park. The area included 30 lots, of which only five were developed. These five lots were owned by members of the Black resort community and included Bruce’s Beach. More information is included on the plaque on Highland Ave. **[QR CODE 3 – Page 29]**

## **The Racist Motivation Behind the Eminent Domain Action [QR CODE 4 – Daugherty Essay in Manhattan Beach News; QR CODE 5 - Page 30]**

In 1943, Frank Daugherty, a member of the City's Board of Trustees from 1915-1920 and 1923-1924, admitted to the *Manhattan Beach News*, "Our attorneys advised the members of the council never to admit the real purpose in establishing the park..." In a February 4, 1927, letter to the *Manhattan Beach News*, the Bruce family wrote: "...the attempt to make a park out of these two blocks was a direct slap at us because we were not born white people."

## **The Legacy of Bruce's Beach**

On May 16, 1927, the Bruce family left Manhattan Beach. They requested \$70,000 for their property and \$50,000 in damages; the Court awarded them \$14,500. **[QR CODE 6 – page 44]** The resort was soon demolished, but the Bruces' legacy would persevere. A series of peaceful protests occurred that summer along the Manhattan Beach shoreline supported by the NAACP that would alter the beachfront landscape of the City indefinitely. Details of this can be found on the additional plaque on Highland Avenue. **[QR CODE 7 – page 33]**