

# Dana Point Historical Society

THE COLLECTIONS OF the Dana Point Historical Society center on the early development of the city in the 1920s, later developments in the 1960s and 1970s, and the efforts in the 1980s that led to the incorporation of Dana Point as a city in 1989. The most successful early developer, Sidney Woodruff, who headed a syndicate of Los Angeles investors, had a plan to create a “Mediterranean Village by the Sea” as a recreational getaway for the people of L.A. sixty miles to the north. That dream has succeeded, in a way, as our adjacent Dana Point Harbor offers recreation for our many visitors. The Capistrano Beach area of Dana Point was being developed at the same time by Ned Doheny, who was backed by his powerful father, Edward Doheny, the oil tycoon. Both developments collapsed as the Great Depression deepened in the early 1930s. Subsequent development of the area did not begin again until the late 1960s, when developers started building new communities and, as the population grew, residents of those communities organized themselves, incorporated their cities, and could then govern themselves rather than relying on a distant county authority.

Our collections centering on these development periods preserve a record of the progress from ranch country to the present city of 40,000. The main collections that we house consist of photographs, documents, clippings, maps, oral history tapes, and books. They are noted below in order of importance and somewhat chronologically.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

The collection of more than 1,500 photographs includes many made by the early developer Sidney Woodruff in the 1920s: scenes of construction operations, aerial views of the development area, sales offices, houses being built, hotels, gatherings of salesmen and customers from Los Angeles in their black 1920s-model cars, shots of Woodruff himself, and a few of Hollywoodland, his previous development in L.A. These are all in black and white, are digitized, and can be sold in various sizes for noncommercial use.

The Doheny development of Capistrano Beach is also represented in the photograph collection. These include aerial views of street layouts and shots of a sales of-

fice, salesmen and potential lot buyers, a grand beach club on the sand, and the Doheny family.

The Dolph Mansion was the first building in Dana Point, constructed in 1914 by a wealthy, adventurous lady from Pennsylvania. The mansion is well represented in period photos, along with Dana Point Harbor construction, aerial views of the coastline before and after the harbor was built, surfing, the first Hobie Cat (designed and launched in Dana Point by Hobie Alter), and other people and events.

## DOCUMENTS

*Woodruff Collection:* In 2006 the Historical Society purchased a collection of documents, letters, maps, photographs, and business forms of the Dana Point Syndicate (later Corporation) that was headed by the developer and owner of the Western Construction Company, Sidney Woodruff. These items cover the period 1926–1939, which covers the formation of the syndicate through its demise in the late 1930s. The early documents are letters of support to Woodruff from investors, lists of subscribers (some famous names: Mack Sennett, Wallace Beery, Harry Chandler), collections for lot payments, appraisals, and lists of beneficiaries of the trust. The later documents are notices of foreclosures and of efforts to lease the land for pasture, agriculture, and oil and gas exploration, and many letters from the Title Insurance and Trust Company dealing with leases. There are architectural renderings of the proposed hotel and lots, aerial photographs of the headlands, including views of flower fields on the headlands and the Dana Point area before development. Included are a booklet of photos of the development and one of specifications for the hotel. Stock certificates, tract maps, newspaper ads, and brochures picturing the development are valuable pieces of the collection. The collection includes a detailed inventory prepared by our former president, Carlos Olvera.

*Walters Collection:* Anna Walters was an officer of an earlier syndicate, the San Juan Point Corporation, that bought property in Dana Point with a plan to build houses and commercial buildings and develop a city. Her company built the original Blue Lantern Fountain Lunch, shown in the photograph below. Her descendants have donated photos, real estate contracts, letters, and court reports concerning the sale of properties and the eventual transition of the San Juan Point Corporation to the Dana Point Syndicate in 1927. Two tract maps of Dana Point and a photo of the sales office are included in this donation. These documents have been digitized.

*Fernald Collection:* Knowlton Fernald Jr. was vice president and director of planning and architecture for the Laguna Niguel Corporation, which planned and developed Laguna Niguel, the first major planned community in the country. Development of this large property, comprising 7,000 acres stretching from the Pacific coast to the San Diego Freeway, began in 1960. The totally planned community consisted of residential, commercial, and industrial areas as well as schools and other public services. The Fernald family donated to the Dana Point Historical Society the portion of Knowlton Fernald's archives that pertained to the area of Laguna Niguel that became part of Dana Point when the latter was incorporated in 1989. The collection includes slides, brochures, and magazine articles covering the entire development.

Of interest to the Dana Point Historical Society is Monarch Bay, a community on the ocean front, for which Fernald designed a special residential area called the Monarch Bay Mall—a group of high-quality houses carefully placed for privacy and maximized views around an open, park-like space. Fernald designed the houses and the complete landscaping

for each lot. This mall area is inside a gated community of custom homes at the junction of Crown Valley Parkway (constructed for this large development) and the Pacific Coast Highway. The collection includes a detailed inventory.

## ORAL HISTORIES

Our collections consist of fifty-four tapes and bound transcriptions of interviews done by Historical Society volunteers with people who have played a role in the birth and growth of Dana Point: the first mayor and early city council members, activists in the movement to incorporate the city, business owners, and early residents. Also, veterans were interviewed for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.

## BOOKS

The Historical Society has a growing collection of books by and about Richard Henry Dana, our namesake, and three documents signed by him. After the voyage famously recorded in his book *Two Years Before the Mast*, Dana returned to Boston, where he became a well-known lawyer and wrote widely on that subject. The collection includes some of those writings, in addition to a growing collection of different editions of *Two Years Before the Mast*, which has never been out of print since it was first published in 1840. Our collection also has books on local and city history, books by and about local surfers, general books on Orange County, and histories of nearby cities.

## CLIPPINGS, RECORDS, MINUTES

Volunteers in the Historical Society collected newspaper clippings about Dana Point, particularly articles about efforts for cityhood and eventual incorporation in 1989. These are housed in three-ring binders dating from 1988 to 1999. Records of the Civic Association's meetings and activities through the 1980s as it worked toward cityhood are available in notebooks. Also available are recordings of City Council meetings.

## MAPS

The collection includes early plat maps of 1887, tract maps of the Woodruff Development (1920s), Dana Point Harbor plans (1969), maps showing the incorporation of Dana Point, a boundary survey (1970s), the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey of 1885, a sales brochure map (1920s), lots for sale in San Juan by the Sea (now Capistrano Beach) in 1887, and recent city maps for Town Center plans.

## SHIP MODELS

The Historical Society is the proud possessor of a professionally built model of the *Pilgrim*, the ship Richard Henry Dana sailed on from Boston to California in 1835. We also have a folk model of the *Alert*, the ship on which Dana returned to Boston two years later. Both are housed in acrylic cases.

## STREET LANTERN AND BEACON LIGHT

We have an authentic ship's-lantern streetlight, many of which graced the streets of Dana Point in the early days. Our streets are appropriately named after colored ship's lanterns; at the end of each street was a light in its namesake color (blue, amber, ruby, green, etc.). The ship's-lantern theme was originated by the first developers, Anna Walters and Sidney Woodruff. In that same vein, a generous donation brought us the actual beacon light that rested atop the Richfield Tower, which was located on the Pacific Coast Highway in Dana Point. Both of these are obsolete, but ours can be lit up for events in the museum.



This is a favorite 1920s photograph that incorporates several key items of importance to the history of Dana Point. (1) Dana Point is on the Pacific Coast Highway, which passes through its center. The roadway in the photograph, then named Roosevelt Highway after Teddy Roosevelt, was paved in 1929. Dana Point is now the southern terminus of California Route 1, the Pacific Coast Highway, as the San Diego Freeway continues on south from here. (2) The building is the 1927 Blue Lantern Fountain Lunch, the oldest commercial building in Dana Point. It still stands as a restaurant, newly modernized and well restored, keeping its original design. (3) The streetlights (at left and right) installed by the early developers were patterned after ships' lanterns to promote the nautical theme of Dana Point. Reproductions have been placed in the City Plaza. (4) The banner on the high pole announces your location: Dana Point. (5) The pole is topped by a tall ship to emphasize the nautical theme and commemorate Richard Henry Dana's visit here in the tall ship *Pilgrim* in 1835. (6) The model year of the cars indicates the period.