



To preserve and enhance the unique village character of Laguna Beach

January 29, 2022  
California Coastal Commission

**Public Comment on February 2022 Agenda Item Thursday 9b - City of Laguna Beach LCP Amendment No. LCP-5-LGB-20-0053-1 (Historic Preservation)**

Honorable Commissioners:

Village Laguna was founded in 1971 with the goal of preserving and enhancing the village atmosphere of Laguna Beach. For 50 years we have pursued this work--monitoring proposed projects, participating in the City's planning efforts, and promoting historic preservation. Village Laguna has participated in every meeting on the Laguna Beach Historic Preservation Ordinance and program since 2014, always with the aim of assuring protection of our historic resources and community character. Over this length of time it has become more and more clear that our city's built environment and landscape have national as well as state-wide and local significance. This has been highlighted in the attached submittal for the Historic American Landscape Survey documentation to the National Park Service. These documents are now housed in the Library of Congress.

The documentation states: "The artistic influence and the character of the landscape shaped a unique community. Laguna's history, including isolation from other development movements, its role as art colony, and its leadership in environmental preservation all stem from the characteristics and disposition of the landscape itself." (p. 5) Respect for this uniqueness and beauty has led our citizens to "develop a program to preserve the character, uniqueness, and diversity of individual neighborhoods... expanding the city's efforts at historic preservation." (p. 51)

From the Staff Report we see that the Coastal staff and Coastal policies share and support these goals. The problem with this Staff Report is that the staff has relied on City positions as expressed in a City of Laguna Beach FAQ memo from February 17, 2017. Many of the statements in that memo are no longer true expressions of the approach the city is taking toward historic preservation.

**Owner Consent**

The proposal before you is the result of a 180° change of approach dictated by the City Council in September and October of 2018 (just before the Council election in November). So the reassuring statements of how the City will continue to preserve our historic resources are part of the City's past policies, not part of the proposed ordinance.

This is because the council inserted **owner consent** as the determining criterion in finding that a property is eligible for the Laguna Beach Historic Register and thus is a local historic resource. This affects every aspect of the historic preservation program.

If a property is not on any historic register, or has not been officially determined eligible for the National or California Register (processes that can take months or years), and an owner doesn't consent to have his or her property considered as a historic resource, that will be the end of the application of the historic preservation ordinance and historic-related CEQA concerns to that property, regardless of its significance as evaluated under the other list of qualities in Section 25.45.006(C)

These are the other criteria for historical significance (eligibility for the Laguna Beach Historic Register):

- (3) It exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community;
- (4) It is identified with a person, events, culture or site significant in local, state or national history;
- (5) It is representative of the work of a notable builder, designer, architect, or artist including those of local importance;
- (6) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction that exemplify a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City;
- (7) It embodies elements that represent a significant structural, engineering, or architectural achievement or innovation;
- (8) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an iconic visual feature or public view point within the City;
- (9) Is one of the remaining examples in the City, region, state or nation possessing distinguishing characteristics of architectural, cultural or historical importance;
- (10) Is an iconic landscape, garden, space or public view point that is significant to the history and heritage of the City;  
or
- (11) Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

All of the above criteria become irrelevant just because a property owner decides unilaterally that he or she doesn't want the property considered as a historic resource.

Would applicants who have a blue line stream, an environmentally significant habitat area, or a coastal bluff edge have the option to say they don't want criteria for those resources applied to their property? Historic resource designation is fact-based, not puffery that can be arbitrarily applied or not depending on one person's wishes.

## **1981 Historic Inventory**

Then there's the proposed deletion of the 1981 Historic Resources Inventory--another important component in the City's Historic Preservation program for the last 40 years. The document was adopted by resolution and that makes it a historic register for CEQA purposes. The staff report on page 10 mentions that the Inventory has 65 properties, and 27 were on the City's Historic Register. Those figures are for the Downtown area only. The 1981 Inventory has 828 properties listed, and the Laguna Beach Historic Register has over 300. This ordinance affects a much greater number of historic resources than acknowledged in the staff report.

There is no justification for arbitrarily dropping the 1981 Historic Inventory. The City can't just pretend that because the Inventory is old it's irrelevant and simply delete it from consideration, especially because protections for the properties therein are enshrined in the LCP and General Plan. Even if you consider that the Inventory should have been updated, it's not someone else who was supposed to do it, it's the City! It's kind of like complaining you are an orphan after you have murdered your parents.

An updated Inventory would remove properties where the resource had been destroyed by fire, for example, and would add properties that have since become historic. The 1981 Inventory only surveyed properties built before 1940. The rest of the properties on the Inventory are even older than they were in 1981 and thus potentially even more significant historically.

There is a partially completed updated inventory on the shelf. The City embarked on updating the Inventory in 2014, but never held hearings on it-- another case of acknowledging the importance of historic documentation and then abandoning it under pressure.

As the City's own memo of February 17, 2017, p. 10 states, "an updated inventory would be a valuable tool because, with regard to the properties surveyed, it provides some level of certainty. Specifically, it provides rebuttable presumption as to whether a property is or is not a historic resource" and is or is not presumed to be a historic resource granted protection under CEQA. Instead of using an inventory the City proposes to consider each property on a case-by-case basis, with no touch stone to refer to for consistency of preservation principles—and if owners decide their property is not historic, the historic factor will not be considered at all!

This is a scenario we are already encountering: Where City staff used to require an owner of a property more than 45 years old to prepare a historical evaluation, City staff now says, "The owners are not interested in putting the property on the Historic Register, there is no point in requiring a historical evaluation." This is how Laguna Beach's historical preservation program would function in the future under the proposed ordinance—there is no provision to require the process Coastal staff cites on page 10 of the staff report, which comes from the 2017 City memo that states policies abandoned under the proposed revised ordinance.

Elimination of the Inventory “would mean that property owners and the City would have to conduct historical resource assessment from scratch for each project involving modifications to, or demolition of structures over 45 years of age.” No, this would not happen because this sentence was written in 2017 by City staff, BEFORE the Council decided on providing for **owner consent**. As explained above, **owner consent** will allow owners to “opt out” of historic preservation altogether, avoiding the need for a historical resource assessment.

Why does the City Council want to drop the Inventory and stop evaluating properties for historical significance? They want to be re-elected by the property owners and developers who have been pushing to remove historic properties from any list so they can redevelop as though they have a vacant lot. The City bases their historic policy completely on the idea that owners will voluntarily preserve their properties because of the incentives offered, ignoring the requirements of CEQA, which applies objective standards not **owner consent**, to determine historic significance.

The Coastal staff report justifies these changes by saying that impacts to community character “will continue to be determined on a case-by-case basis through the coastal development permit process.” The whole idea of having a Local Coastal Program and Implementation Plans is to set policies and procedures in place to avoid the arbitrary decision-making and lack of consistency that can occur if policies are implemented on a case-by-case basis. This ordinance with its fundamental flaws of **owner consent** and **abandonment of adopted historical research** represents a huge step backward in achieving the consistency of decision-making and ultimately in achieving effective historic preservation and protection of community character.

What will be the result? Diminishment and ultimate loss of the Laguna Beach historical character so appreciated both within our borders and beyond.

### **Reducing the number of properties qualifying as historic resources**

The Coastal staff report includes numerous instances that say “the City has indicated” without explaining where these assurances come from. For example on page 10 staff says, “The City has indicated that the proposed changes do not modify the historic status of any property.” Yet this principle is not included in the ordinance, and by requiring **owner consent** as a required component in the definition of historic resource, and by eliminating the 1981 Historic Inventory, the proposed ordinance necessarily **does** change the historic status in the City’s eyes of all the possible historic properties that have not already been placed on the City’s Historic Register.

The new definition of “Historic Resource” in the ordinance also greatly reduces the number of qualifying properties. If not already on the City’s Register properties must be on the National Register of Historic Places or “officially determined to be eligible for the National Register by the National Park Service,” or on the California Register of Historical Resources, or “officially determined to be eligible for the California Register by the State Historical Resource Commission.” How are these determinations to be obtained in the context of deadlines for an application for development and coastal development permit? This sets an almost impossible bar and requires public intervention in the permit process over and over. This alone will leave

many valuable resources unprotected. The 1981 Inventory highlighted properties eligible for the National Register. The Report notes that “the City states...’those will require a historic assessment before they can be modified...These properties are not on the City’s Register, but the City nonetheless recognizes the need to preserve them.’” (p. 16) However, if a consultant hired by the developer were to find the property eligible only for the local Register, then they would not be preserved, unless the owner agrees.

The definition of a historic resource completely omits any reference to properties of local significance, which were a key part of the 1981 Inventory, and are tremendously important to preservation of neighborhood character. Lastly the ordinance adds the mystery phrase to the definition of historic resource: one that “the City is mandated by law to treat as a historic resource based on substantial evidence in light of the whole record.” This implies that these determinations would have to be litigated in order to establish that a project produces “substantial evidence in light of the whole record.” Again this represents a tremendous burden on the citizenry that is trying to protect coastal resources and community character.

There are many other detailed problems with the proposed ordinance. This is one: The definition of “demolition” as “any act which removes all the existing exterior walls, cladding and roof framing, including complete destruction/removal of the historic structure” does not recognize the special requirements of maintaining the “integrity” of a historic structure and conforming to the Secretary of Interior Standards. Integrity can be lost by removal of “character defining features.” Whole walls do not have to be removed to damage a historic structure, destroy its historic integrity, thus impairing its historic significance. Thus there should be a definition of demolition especially for historic properties, such as, “any act which removes or impairs the character-defining features, affecting the building’s integrity as a historic resource.”

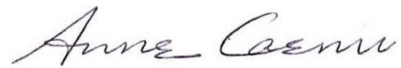
Nothing in the staff report or the City’s analysis of the project addresses the significant environmental impacts of the proposed changes, which will affect historic resources, aesthetics, and visual character. As it is, the proposed ordinance and amendment require an Environmental Impact Report, and the Staff Report doesn’t supply the required functional equivalent.

This proposal from the City of Laguna Beach is a perfect example of the need for an over-arching review such as the Coastal Commission provides. Local politicians simply cannot withstand the barrage of complaints by some owners of historic properties and developers whose appreciation for the uniqueness and value of Laguna Beach does not outweigh their personal desire to maximize what they see as the development potential of their properties. We hope that your objectivity will prevail and that you will see how this ordinance as submitted is not true historic preservation. It does not protect community character of the Coast as your mission dictates. It paves the road to mass redevelopment of historic properties, and tragic destruction of the Historic American Landscape of Laguna Beach that has been so carefully protected all these years.

We urge the Commission to deny the LUP amendment. This project is not in conformity with the policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act and would not comply with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Please instruct the City to revise its amendments and produce a submittal that is at least as effective in historical preservation as the existing ordinance and land use policies, and which does not include the major flaw of defining a historic resource in terms of **owner consent**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Caenn".

Anne Caenn, president

Please put your view settings page display on 2-page view for the next section of the submittal.





This book celebrates Laguna Beach and its greenbelt, which have been designated a historic American landscape by the National Park Service, Department of Interior, and presents the nomination documentation that is housed in the Library of Congress. It is dedicated to the generations of devoted people responsible for shaping the city's character and traditions.

Laguna's mountains and dramatic canyons, coastal cliffs, and ever-changing ocean views attracted plein air artists and others beginning early in the last century, and from the beginning, its residents were dedicated to protecting and embellishing it. The fortunate confluence of geography, history, and community resolve has resulted in the preservation, in the face of the surrounding suburban sprawl, of an authentic small town and a vast area of protected open space that provides breathing room for all of us.



# LAGUNA BEACH and the Greenbelt

Celebrating a Treasured Historic  
American Landscape

LAGUNA BEACH AND THE GREENBELT







*Laguna Coastline* (Joseph Kleitsch) Ca. 1926 – Collection of John and Patricia Dilks

# **Laguna Beach and the Greenbelt**

Celebrating a Treasured Historic  
American Landscape

Committee for Preservation of the Laguna Legacy

*Laguna Beach and the Greenbelt*  
Celebrating a Treasured Historic American Landscape

*Historic American Landscape Survey - National  
Park Service HALS - CA123*

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*ISBN: 978-1-5320-1507-6 (sc)  
ISBN: 978-1-5320-1508-3 (e)*

*Library of Congress Control Number: 2017900506*

*Print information available on the last page.*

*iUniverse rev. date: 02/01/2017*

*Front cover: Laguna Coastline (Joseph Kleitsch) Ca.  
1926 – Collection of John and Patricia Dilks*

*Back cover: Laurel Canyon (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010*





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## Foreword

The genesis of this project lies in a visit to Laguna Beach by Noel Vernon, professor at Cal Poly Pomona, on August 10, 2009. Vernon was the American Society of Landscape Architects coordinator for the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) and introduced the program to Ann Christoph, Vonn Marie May, Ted Wells, and Tom Osborne. At that meeting Christoph suggested nominating the city of Laguna Beach and the Laguna Greenbelt as a Historic American Landscape. The nomination would emphasize the fact that the dramatic and scenic landscape had been the basis of the development of Laguna Beach as an art colony, with a tradition of environmental awareness and protection, and ultimately as a center of citizen-generated landscape preservation.

The HALS nomination idea was discussed for years and was well received, but it was not acted upon until Ron Chilcote organized a committee that met for the first time on March 9, 2015. The group agreed that the greenbelt, the legacy of plein air painting, the seascape and bluebelt, and Laguna Beach as a special place all pointed to a need to identify the history and effect of this unique landscape: to describe its characteristics, document its importance, and record its past so that present and future generations would recognize its significance.

With knowledgeable and enthusiastic members, the committee coalesced to produce the nomination application.

The Committee for Preservation of the Laguna Legacy members were as follows:

Bob Borthwick, landscape architect; former member, Open Space Commission, City of Laguna Beach; board member, Laguna Greenbelt; board member, Temple Hills Community Association; prepared city's Landscape and Scenic Highways Element and Resource Document

Mark Chamberlain, photographer; director, BC Space Galley; member, Laguna Bluebelt and Transition Laguna

Ron Chilcote, professor, University of California, Riverside; former member, Laguna Beach Unified School District board; board member, Laguna Greenbelt; coordinator, Temple Hills Community Association

Ann Christoph, landscape architect; former councilmember and mayor, City of Laguna Beach; board member, South Laguna Civic Association and Village Laguna; prepared city's Landscape and Scenic Highways Element and Resource Document

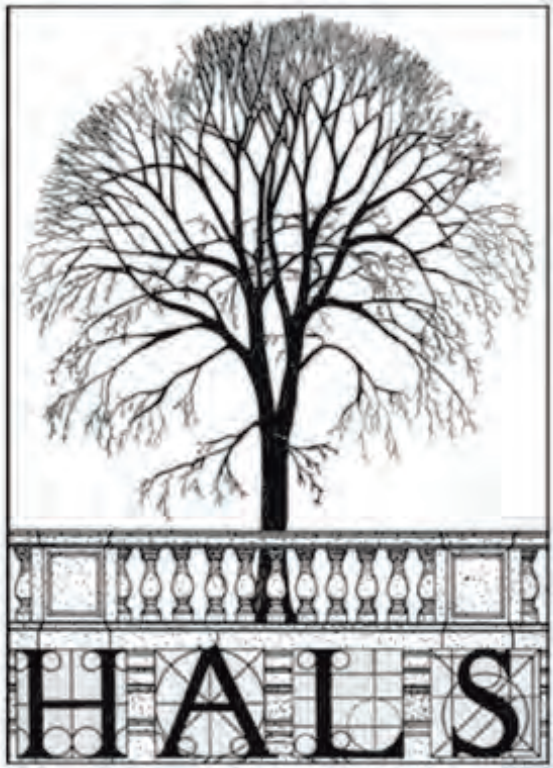
Harry Huggins, retired Orange County Parks administrator; former staff liaison to the Coastal Greenbelt Authority; board member, Laguna Greenbelt; board member, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks; organizer and coordinator of the 1989 Walk in the Canyon

Eric Jessen, retired chief, Orange County Parks; board member, Laguna Beach Historical Society

Tom Lamb, photographer; board member, Festival of the Arts, Laguna Beach; participant in drafting the original HALS legislation

Barbara Metzger, editor; former Design Review Board member and Planning Commissioner, City of Laguna Beach; board member, Village Laguna

Verna Rollinger, former councilmember and retired city clerk, City of Laguna Beach; vice president, Village Laguna; board member, Temple Hills Community Association



*Low Tide* (Clarence Hinkle) Ca. 1922 –  
Laguna Art Museum (LAM)

In cooperation with the Library of Congress, the National Park Service administers the Historic American Buildings Survey (since 1933), the Historic American Engineering Record (since 1969), and the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS), begun in 2000 in cooperation with the American Society of Landscape Architects. These programs encourage and facilitate the documentation of the history and characteristics of important buildings, engineering projects, and landscapes. Over 40,000 structures and sites have been documented nationwide. The archives produced through these programs are housed in the Library of Congress. According to the National Park Service (n.d.),

Historic landscapes are special places. They are important touchstones of national, regional, and local identity. They foster a sense of community and place. Historic landscapes are also fragile places. They are affected by the forces of nature, and by commercial and residential development, vandalism and neglect. They undergo changes that are often unpredictable and irreversible. For these reasons and for the benefit of future generations, it is important to document these places.

As a result of the local committee's work, Laguna Beach and its greenbelt have been recognized as a Historic American Landscape, and this publication presents the documentation on which the designation is based. The committee acknowledges the help of the following: for research assistance, Janet Blake, Laguna Art Museum; Lisette Chel-Walker, City Clerk; Nelda Stone, Laguna Beach Library; For guidance in preparing the submittal, Alison Terry, landscape architect and ASLA HALS liaison; for assistance in preparation of maps, Alison Terry, Lance Vallery, and Scott Thomas; for preparing the initial layout of this book, Tom Lamb; for permission to include art work from their collections, the City of Laguna Beach, the Festival of Arts, the Laguna Art Museum, and John and Patricia Dilks; and for facilitating publication and distribution, Laguna Wilderness Press and the Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation.









*Sycamore Hills*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010

## 1

### The Place and Its Significance

Laguna Beach and its greenbelt are worthy of designation as a Historic American Landscape because the city's beautiful and dramatic natural setting is intricately related to the community and artistic tradition that grew from it. Its geological formations, natural vegetation, and coastal location attracted artists beginning around the turn of the last century. The artistic influence and the character of the landscape shaped a unique community. Laguna's history, including isolation from other development movements, its role as art colony, and its leadership in environmental preservation all stem from the characteristics and disposition of the landscape itself. The following sections elaborate on these complex and remarkable interrelationships.

Laguna Beach and its preserved open space environs rest within Orange County, California between the 405 Freeway in the north, Newport Coast Road to the west, the city of Laguna Niguel to the east, and Dana Point to the south. Laguna Beach is a city of some 23,000 set between the Pacific Ocean and the hills and surrounded by 22,000 acres of protected open space. The city describes itself on its web site as "a unique beach community and artists' colony" and says that residents enjoy "the ambiance provided by the sandy beaches, canyons, and coastal hills" and "a pedestrian environment and scale which is unique in Southern California." In its "Design Guidelines: A Guide to Residential Development" (City of Laguna Beach 2010) it says that it is "committed to protecting its unique character" through the application of criteria for sensitive urban design that "emphasize respect for context, design creativity, compatibility of scale, and the pedestrian experience."

The Laguna Beach landscape, with its mountains and dramatic canyons, coastal cliffs, caves and arches, and

ever-changing ocean views, is unique in its region, state, and nation and has provided the setting and inspiration for a remarkable history. First inhabited by Native Americans who subsisted on fishing, seed gathering, and hunting, much of the area was excluded from the early Spanish ranchos. The rough Laguna landscape wasn't easy to traverse, and there was other abundant land with gentler terrain more suitable for ranching. Therefore it was still available for homesteading beginning in 1871. In the early 1900s artists discovered the village of Laguna Beach and its surroundings as providing inspiring subjects for their plein air paintings. With the exhibition of these paintings nationwide, Laguna Beach became a desired destination.

Up until the 1960s the open space surrounding the city was undeveloped. Orange County had been established in 1888, but population growth, especially in its southern half, had been slow until the 1950s. When the population of the county suddenly doubled in the 1960s (from 703,925 in 1950 to 1,420,386 in 1960) while Laguna Beach grew modestly (from 6,661 to 9,288 in that decade) (California State Data Center 2013), the local bookstore owner James Dilley, who had visited and studied the Garden Cities near London, foresaw that the urbanization of Los Angeles and its suburbs could creep all the way to Laguna Beach—that

the open lands surrounding the city were in jeopardy. In response, in 1968 he founded the Laguna Greenbelt, which would work over the coming years to preserve the natural landscapes encircling the town on the north, east, and south. The addition of marine life reserves along the Laguna coast in 2012 meant that the city was entirely surrounded by natural preserves.

From the beginning, residents were dedicated to protecting the landscape, preventing development that was inappropriate for its setting, and embellishing the town with beautification projects. The most dramatic of these efforts was the citizen initiative limiting all building heights to 36' in 1971. Protection of the village character has been the focus of citizen-based planning efforts. The fortunate confluence of geography, history, and human resolve has resulted in the preservation, in the face of the county's suburban sprawl, of an authentic small town and a vast area of protected open space that provides breathing room for the whole county. Long protected by its topography and remote location, the city had time and opportunity to develop the character that prepared it to embrace the environmentalism sweeping the country in the 1960s and put it to immediate use in guiding the city's development. This is a success story, and it is ongoing.



*Laguna Vista*  
(Benjamin Chambers Brown) 1915 – LAM



*Our Coast*  
(Gleason J. Duncan) 1930 - LAM





*Blue Sky and Sea* (Frank Cuprien) 1930 – LAM



*The Old Post Office* (Joseph Kleitsch) 1922-1923 - LAM



## Origins and Early History

Originally the Laguna area was home to Native Americans known as the Acjachemen, and remnants of their cultures are scattered in and around Laguna Beach (see, e.g., Brown, O’Neil, and Steely 2006, Table 2). The Orange County coast is known to have been heavily populated during the Late Prehistoric and Contact Periods, and a few of these settlements in the vicinity of Laguna Beach are known by name. The place-name Tom-ok’ may be a reference to the Laguna lakes (O’Neil and Evans 1980), and Nawil is associated with a site in Emerald Canyon in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park (O’Neil 1988, 112). Locales where Contact Period sites might be expected, such as Laguna’s coastal bluffs, are almost continuous shell middens (O’Neil 2006). There is soil flecked with charcoal on every ridge that ends at the sea between Corona del Mar and Dana Point (Chilcote 2014). Some sites are believed to have been occupied for thousands of years. A WPA-funded excavation at Goff’s Island in 1939 revealed a significant coastal village and burial ground (Winterbourne 1939), and Morris-Smith (1979) has studied a burial ground in a cave in Sycamore Hills and identified many sites elsewhere.

The Acjachemen generally resided in permanent, well-defined villages of 35 to 150 persons in houses of brush or tules lashed to a frame of poles. Sandstone caves in the canyons served as temporary or special-use camps. A village might consist of a single patrilineage or an entire clan, and each had its own resource territory but maintained ties to others in the area through economic, religious, and social networks (O’Neil 2006). Kinship was patrilineal and most residence patrilocal (O’Neil 2002). Although water was scarce, seed-bearing plants were abundant during the summer and fall, and the rocky shores and bays were full of

sea life. Acorns were the single most important food source. The principal game animals were deer, rabbit, jackrabbit, wood rat, mouse, ground squirrel, antelope, and quail and other birds. Sea mammals, fish, and crustaceans were hunted and gathered from both the shoreline and the open ocean using reed and dugout canoes (O’Neil 2006).

In 1769 the Franciscan priest Juan Crespi, traveling with the Spanish governor, Gaspar de Portolá, and his soldiers, described Aliso Canyon as follows: “All the valleys and hills on both sides are of pure earth, well-covered with grass, and without a single stone. So we went on over very open country, with hills and broad mesas, ascending and descending through three or four little valleys of good soil well-grown with alders” (Meadows 1966, 41). The Indians, whom Crespi found passive and friendly, soon became subject to the Franciscan mission established on November 1, 1776, as San Juan Capistrano, the first permanent Spanish settlement in Orange County (Chilcote 2014).

During the 1840s most of what is now Laguna Beach was excluded from the two surrounding land grants (the Rancho San Joaquín, later the Irvine Ranch, and the Rancho Niguel, later the Moulton Ranch), and therefore it was subject to homestead claims once California became an American state. This exclusion had everything to do with the development of the city and its landscape in its present location and pattern.

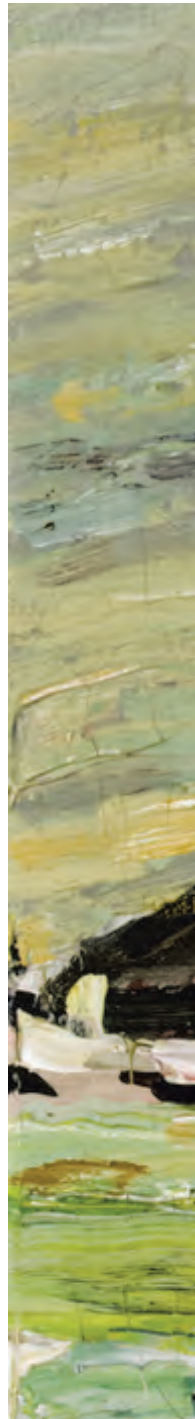
To the north of Laguna Beach the 48,803-acre Rancho San Joaquín was created by two grants (April 13, 1837, and May 13, 1842) to José Sepúlveda. The first, known as Ciénega de las Ranas, extended from above Newport Bay to Red Hill in Tustin, and the second, La Bolsa de San Joaquín, included Laguna Canyon Creek. To the south the 13,316-acre Rancho Niguel was granted to Juan Ávila and his sister Concepción (June 21, 1842) and included land on



both sides of Aliso Creek between Laguna Canyon and the mission lands of San Juan Capistrano (Chilcote 2014) . José Serrano, who in 1842 was granted lands where present-day Laguna Hills is located and established the Rancho Cañada de los Alisos, had been grazing his cattle in Aliso Canyon since 1836 (Meadows 1966, 100–102). From the 1850s on, cattle roamed the area now known as Laguna Beach, although the drought of 1862–64 brought devastation: “For years dry bones lay around the dried up water holes where the cattle had come to drink and where they had died by the thousands piling on top of each other. For years the dry bones were ground up for fertilizer” (Ramsey and Ramsey 1976, 100).



*Rain on the Hills* (Arthur Grover Rider) 1935 - LAM



*Old Barn* (Clarence Hinkle) Ca. 1918 - LAM

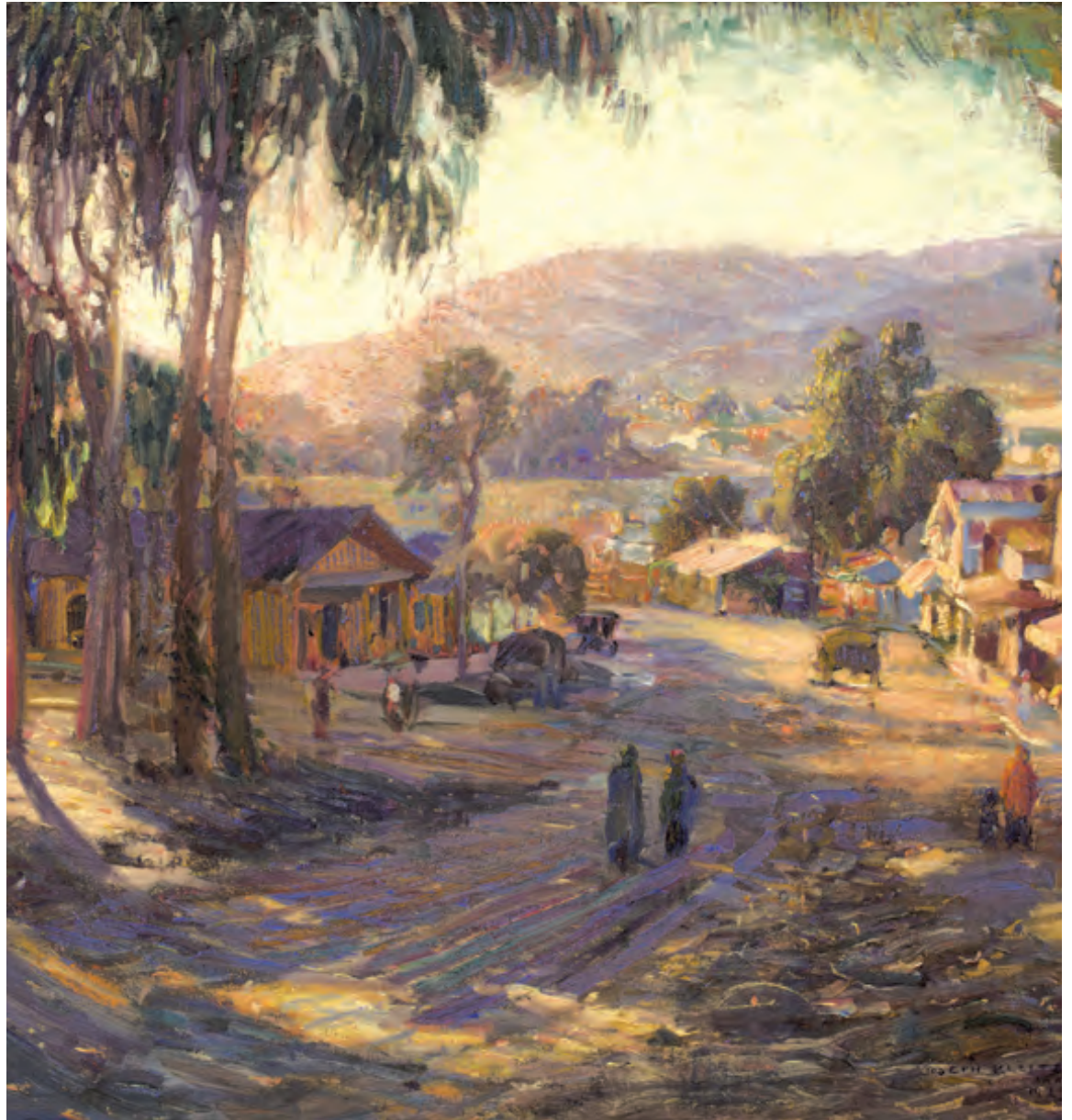
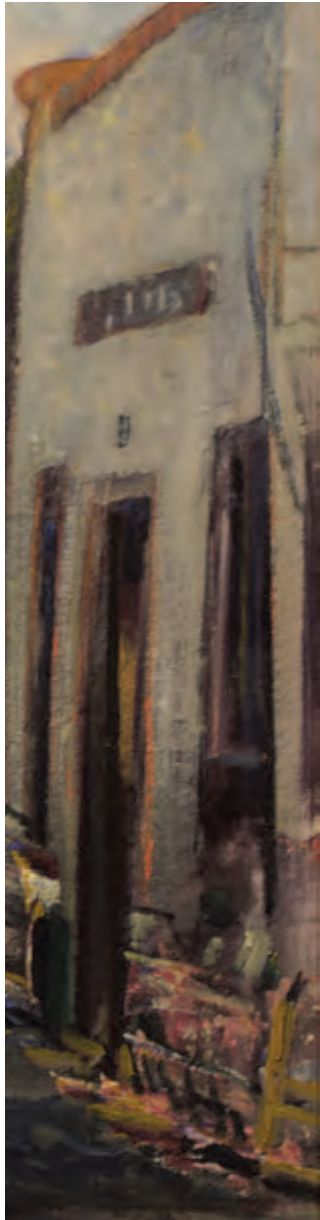






*The White House* (Joseph Kleitsch) 1930 – City of Laguna Beach Art Collection (CLB)





*Laguna Road* (Joseph Kleitsch) 1924 – CLB

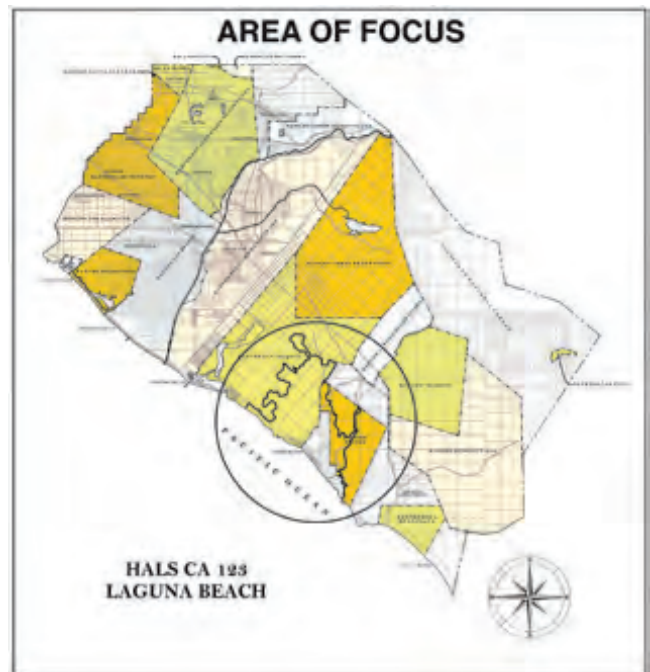
James Irvine, an Irishman who had come to San Francisco in 1848 and made his fortune as a merchant in the California gold rush, purchased Rancho San Joaquín from José Sepúlveda in 1864 and Rancho Lomas de Santiago from William Wolfskill in 1866. In 1876 he established the Irvine Ranch. With his death in 1886 the ranch passed to his son, James Irvine II, who assumed control in 1893 at the age of 25. He moved his family from San Francisco after the earthquake in 1906 (Irvine Ranch [2001]) and shifted much of the ranch from cattle-grazing to irrigated crops, growing acres of oranges and vegetables. The ranch continued, however, to run cattle on the Laguna hillsides well into the 1990s.

Over the years Rancho Niguel passed through many hands, in whole or in part, and by 1874 was largely owned by Cyrus B. Rawson. Lewis F. Moulton, who ran sheep on rented land from Oceanside to Wilmington, rented 1,600 acres of Rancho Niguel from Jonathan Bacon in 1881 and the rest of the ranch, 17,000 acres, from Rawson in 1884. In 1894 he bought Rawson's acreage and sold a one-third interest to Jean-Pierre Daguerre. In 1899 the two men bought Bacon's piece and later other property to put together the nearly 22,000-acre Moulton Ranch. After Daguerre's death in 1911 (when his one-third share went to his widow), Moulton shifted from sheep to cattle—according to his daughter, Charlotte Moulton (1932), because the development of the area had made it difficult to move sheep to distant pastures in dry years.

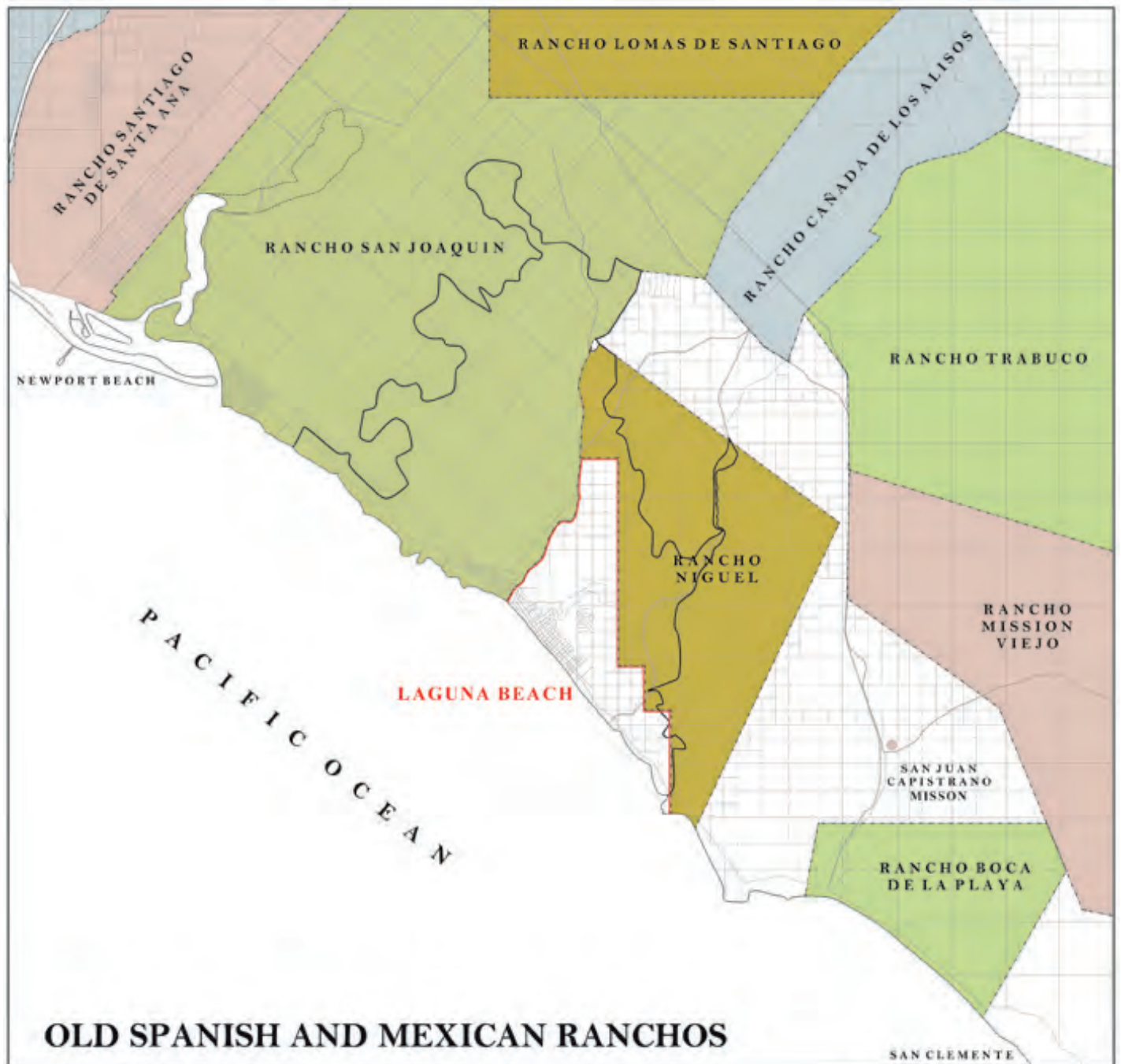
Homesteaders filed claims on land south of the Irvine Ranch and Laguna Canyon Road and west of Rancho Niguel beginning in 1876. Beryl Viebeck's (1996) map shows 39 claims arranged in a north-south-oriented patchwork following the U.S. township-and-range survey system. The first settler, Eugene Salter, started a homestead in Aliso Canyon, and in 1871 his abandoned cabin was occupied by

George Thurston and his family. Members of the Thurston family remained for fifty years on what is now the golf course of the Ranch at Laguna Beach, located along Aliso Creek just before it reaches the sea (Thurston 1947). As early as 1875, the federal government deputy surveyor E. G. Nichols wrote in his field notes (City of Laguna Beach 2006, 3),

The land in this township produces but very little vegetation of any value and what little feed there is grows so high up among the rocks that it is almost out of the reach of stock. The water of Laguna Creek is quite salty. The ground rises half a mile from the ocean level to about 1000 feet. There are a few sycamore trees in the canon (sic) but the timber is chiefly Elder and Willow. There is a pleasant place on the beach at the mouth of this canon and it is quite a resort.









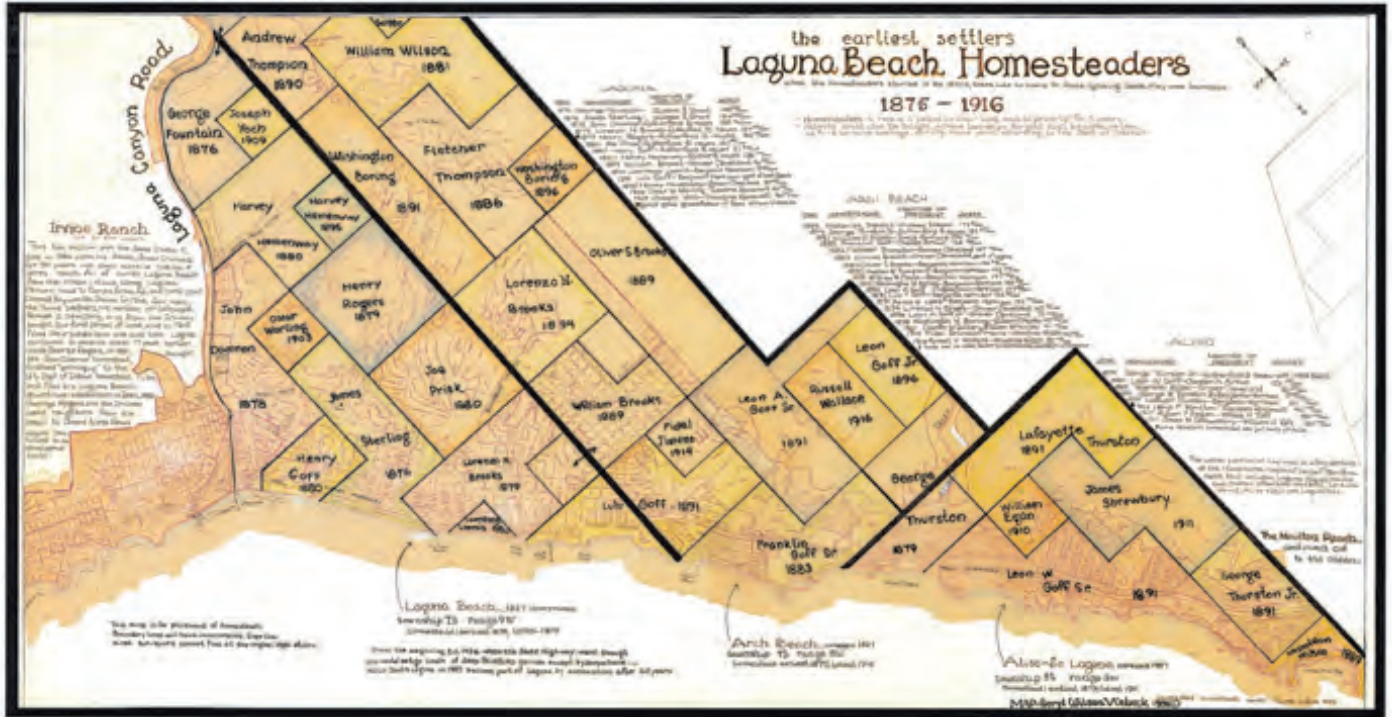
Nathaniel Brooks homesteaded at Arch Beach in 1876 and his brother William in Arch Beach Heights in 1889. In 1878 John Damron homesteaded the flat land of downtown and part of Temple Hills, and the next year Henry Rogers homesteaded an area from Temple Hills to Mystic Hills. Harvey L. Hemenway homesteaded 78 acres in Laguna Canyon in the 1880s, and Frank Goff settled on land north of Aliso Canyon in 1883. Later the Damron property was sold to George Rogers, whose creation of lots in the downtown was the town's first subdivision. Rogers's home stood on the site of the present city hall in front of the now-enormous pepper tree that he had planted (Viebeck 1995, 7). Adjacent to it Rogers established the first school. In 1888 a new school was built by Mormons in Laguna Canyon near the intersection of El Toro Road and Laguna Canyon Road, and in 1893 it was moved to Canyon Acres and in 1908 to Aliso Street (now Catalina Street), where it became the first Catholic church. In 1931 it was moved to the corner of Legion and Through Street, where it became

Joseph Kleitsch's studio. It was demolished to construct the Little Church by the Sea. The school house that is now Legion Hall was originally Laguna Beach Grammar School, built in 1908 on the south side of Park Avenue where the high school is now. It was moved to its present location on the corner of Legion and Catalina in 1928 (Jane Janz, personal communication, May 8, 2016).

The land on the north side of Laguna Canyon Road was owned by the Irvines and purchased from them by Howard G. Heisler in 1905, to be developed by Heisler, L. C. McKnight, and the Thumb brothers (Viebeck 1996). Eighteen-plus acres of the subdivision on the coastal blufftop were set aside as Heisler Park (City of Laguna Beach 2002). These subdivisions were followed by a number of tract maps that established a pattern of small lots intended for vacation homes. In 1911 subdivision shifted to Arch Beach Heights, where nearly 1,900 25' x 100' lots were created on a map with apparently no consideration of topography.



*Mt. Baldy from Laguna Canyon* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Laguna Beach Homestead Map* (© 1996 Beryl Wilson Viebeck, reproduced by permission)





*Palmer Place* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016





Access to these lots began to be provided only in the 1930s and remained very limited until the 1960s. Joe Thurston and others filed the first of the tract maps for Temple Hills in 1921. The Diamond/Crestview area was subdivided in 1925 on very steep hillsides without resolving difficulties of access and construction (City of Laguna Beach 2006). By 1927, when the community was incorporated, the pioneers had already recorded tract maps over most of the shoreline. Some lots made available by the depression of the 1890s sold for as little as a dollar per front foot. The typical subdivision created a street right-of-way parallel to the coastline, with private ownership extending from the street to the mean-high-tide line (City of Laguna Beach 1988). After the 1927 incorporation, forty-seven annexations created the present-day boundaries of the City of Laguna Beach, some of the largest being Top of the World (1956), Bluebird Canyon/Arch Beach Heights (1965), Laguna Canyon (1966–1989) and South Laguna (1987).

A trail initially used by Native Americans extended through Laguna Canyon. This was to become the southeastern limit of the San Joaquín land grant and the Irvine Ranch. William Brooks facilitated travel through the canyon with the first stage line for a handful of residents and visitors, having successfully sued the Irvine Ranch, which in 1886 had closed off the old Laguna Canyon trail (Blacketer 2001). Water was available there for the cattle of the Irvine and Moulton ranches, each approaching the Laguna Lakes from its own side of the road (Ramsey and Ramsey 1976, 44). In 1907 Frank Richey, a beekeeper, drilled a well for his home in Laguna Canyon, and until 1945 (when his family removed the pump) visitors to Laguna frequently stopped there for water (City of Laguna Beach 1991). In 1914 Guy and Joe Skidmore built a water line from the canyon that supplied water to homes in Laguna Beach until 1926, when the brackish water persuaded voters to abandon the wells in favor of a new water district (Ramsey and Ramsey 1976; Chilcote 2014). In 1917 Laguna Canyon Road was paved by the county (Borthwick 2015).



*Palmer Place* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Catalina Street* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Malcolm St. Clair residence, Carmelita Street (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*





## The Plein Air Painters

Because the 1769 Portolá expedition had turned inland up the Capistrano Valley and skirted the back side of the Niguel and San Joaquin Hills, and because the rancho grants excluded the Laguna area, the treasure of Laguna remained hidden, only to inspire later visitors. More than 100 years later, adventurers from the missions and pueblos found their way down Aliso and Laguna Canyons and, when they got to the coast, found a stunningly rich texture of sandy beaches and coves punctuated by steep cliffs and rocky promontories. Once word got out about Laguna's magnificent terrain and translucent ocean waters, artists were quick to follow. As art historian Bolton Colburn (2015) has put it, "Laguna Beach has long provided an inspiring and beneficial environment for the artist, one that has few equals anywhere. Historically, that was mainly due to the region's being remarkably beautiful and undeveloped at the turn of the twentieth century, a blank slate that allowed personal freedom and the sense that anything was possible." Among the first to arrive were Norman St. Clair and William Lees Judson, St. Clair a watercolorist and Judson the founding dean of the University of Southern California School of Architecture and Fine Arts. It was Judson who first brought art students down to Laguna to paint *en plein air*, outdoors, to capture the ever-changing atmospherics that soon became known as "Laguna light."

By 1918, when the population of the town was 300, there were enough full and part-time artists in Laguna to form the Laguna Beach Art Association. By this time Laguna was home to scores of prominent California plein air artists. From Europe came William Wendt of Germany and Joseph Kleitsch of Hungary, from the United States Edgar Payne and Anna Hills. Other luminaries were Frank Cuprien, Clarence Hinkle, and William Griffith,

*Laguna Beach* (Joseph Kleitsch)  
1926 – Festival of Arts Permanent  
Art Collection (FOAPAC)



and there were many others. Wendt's landscapes focused on the hillside, coastal bluff, and sea cliff terrain. Payne's canvases focused largely on crashing waves and the majestic Eastern Sierras. More than others, Kleitsch's work captured rapid development changes in the town during its transition from isolated seaside colony to resort. Cuprien kept his eyes on subtle sunset variations, while many of Hinkle's works dwelt on intimate domestic scenes. Numerous major publications document the lives and work of the plein air artists in Laguna Beach. A sampling includes *Plein Air Painters of California: The Southland* (Westphal 1982), *Loners, Mavericks, and Dreamers: Art in Los Angeles before 1900* (Moure 1994) and *California Art: 450 Years of Painting and Other Media* (Moure 1998), *Early Artists in Laguna Beach: The Impressionists* (Dominik 1986), *Joseph Kleitsch: A Kaleidoscope of Color* (Trenton 2007), *Edgar Payne: The Scenic Journey* (Shields et al. 2012), and *Miss Hills of Laguna Beach—Anna Althea Hills: Art, Education, Community* (Blake 2016).

The first of these concludes (Westphal 1982, 126), "Those early days of Laguna Beach marked a unique experience in American art. The artists to follow, including students of these exceptional painters, would never interpret nature as they did nor convey the rich quality they achieved."

Beatrice Whittlesey, a longtime Laguna Beach resident and for a time in the 1960s a member of the city's planning commission, spent several summers in Laguna Beach beginning in 1906. She later wrote that her father, the Los Angeles architect Austin Whittlesey, had hired Norman St. Clair to do the renderings of his architectural drawings, and St. Clair had shown him watercolors of Laguna Beach. "Dad said, 'If it's that beautiful, we'd better go there'" (Whittlesey 1985, 5). Merle and Mabel Ramsey (1975, 1–2) described summer visits to Laguna Beach at the turn of the century as follows:



*South Laguna character, small street and large trees* (Ann Christoph) 2016





*Flower Stalls* (Virginia Woolley) Ca. 1930 – FOAPAC



*Gazebo Pier* (William Griffith) 1931 - CLB



*Site of City Hall, Laguna Beach* (Roy Ropp) Ca. 1926 – CLB





*House by the Sea* (Virginia Woolley) 1930 - CLB

A trip to Laguna Beach was prepared for and talked about for many days as Santa Ana was the nearest city. This meant there would be 20 miles of slow driving by horse and buggy which would take at least half a day. Coming down the dusty canyon, you would hope at every turn to glimpse the ocean. Then, thinking that the trip would never end, the eucalyptus trees came into view. You were sure the wide ocean would be next! Yes, there were the white tents along the beach. . . . All else was forgotten. . . . You were now in Laguna Beach, away from any cares and worries.

Laguna Beach in 1924 was contrasted with Huntington Beach in an article in the *Los Angeles Sunday Times* (Starr 1924) as follows:

Laguna Beach beckons to artists, writers and globe trotters. She is unique and individual and wants to stay that way. Huntington Beach, on the other hand, encourages the oil prospector and the industrial wizard. Both have beaches quite different in topographical features, each beautiful in its own way. . . . Aristocratic Laguna Beach wants to be known as the “Riviera of America.” . . . A paved boulevard from Santa Ana, winding among rolling green hills is at present the only access to this beach, while completion of the coast highway through the town means much to its future development. . . . The variety of marine growth at Laguna Beach is said to be the finest on the Pacific Coast, and the delicate white orpine flowers which cover the hills back of the town are held in such high esteem that residents of Laguna Beach never cut them or retard their growth.

A year-round population of 1,500–2,000 was reported to increase in summer to 5,000–10,000, with auto camps in Laguna Canyon and on Aliso Beach. Reporting on development, the *Times* listed a new two-story business block, a new bank, a dance hall on the beach, a theater, a bathhouse, a library, and three churches, in addition to the Pomona Marine Laboratory.







*Eternal Surge* (Edgar Payne) 1920 – LAM

*Temple Hills* (Joseph Kleitsch) 1926 - FOAPAC





*The Fog Bank* (Frank Cuprien) 1914 - LAM



*It Rained the Next Day, Sunset #5* (Frank Cuprien) 1938 - LAM





*Sunset Heisler Park* (Jacobus Baas) 2010 - FOAPAC

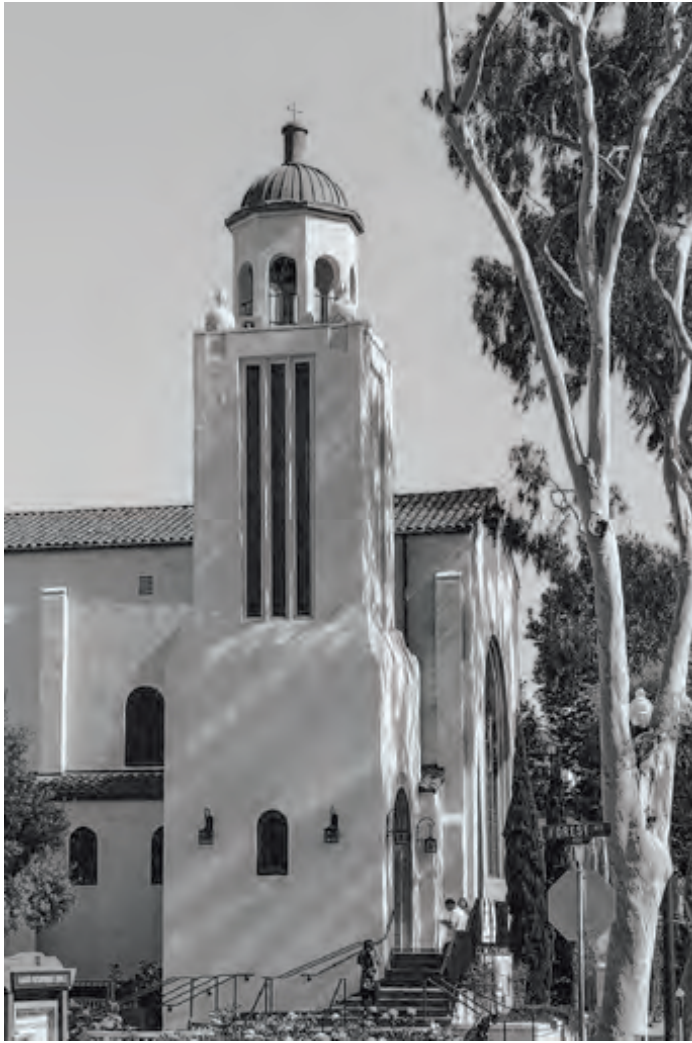




## The City Beautiful

The city was valued for its beautiful landscape from its very beginnings. The plein air painters who settled and worked here recorded its natural features, and present-day urban designers such as Steven Kellenberg (2013) appreciate it for the authenticity and eclecticism of its architecture, the diversity of its landscapes, its varied street grids, its downtown core, its openings to the surrounding hills, and its street-end views of the ocean. Secluded by its surrounding hills, overlooked by the early explorers, and left out of the nineteenth-century land grants, it was settled late and homesteaded in small plots that were individually subdivided, creating a patchwork of neighborhoods rather than any uniform grid pattern. Its coastline mirrors this small scale, consisting of a series of named coves rather than long open beaches. The plein air painters who were prominent among the first settlers helped spread the word about Laguna's charms.

From the beginning, too, residents took every opportunity to preserve and enhance its beauty. For example, in January 1925, the Laguna Beach Woman's Club (founded in 1922) called a meeting of representatives of organizations in the city to launch a campaign to make Laguna Beach "the Paradise of the Pacific" (*Laguna Beach Life*, January 16, 1925). Dr. William C. Minifie, who spoke at the kickoff meeting, talked of Laguna's "glorious natural scenery with its superb coastline of fantastic rocks, crystal coves, sandy bays, bold headlands, and curving beaches," its "majestic hills," and "the wonderful canyon drive by which the visitor enters Laguna." The Woman's Club secured (from Ernest L. Bowen) the donation of 700 Monterey cypress trees to be distributed free for planting on Arbor Day that year with the goal of helping "put Laguna Beach to the fore as a bower of loveliness and a hillside of grandeur" (*Laguna Beach*



*Presbyterian Church, Forest Avenue*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016

*North Laguna* (Ken Knutsen) Ca. 1950 – FOAPAC





*The White Barn (Anna Hills)*  
Ca. 1900 - FOAPAC

*Life*, February 13, 1925). The celebrated landscape architect Florence Yoch, who came from a Laguna Beach family, recommended planting “thousands of trees” and provided a list of trees that would do well in Laguna (*Laguna Beach Life*, March 20, 1925). Joe Thurston gave the city a 12–15-acre grove at the top of Temple Hills for a park (*Laguna Beach Life*, April 3, 1925). The Laguna Beach Garden Club, established in 1928, focused on planting trees, preventing existing trees from being cut down, and keeping billboards off the highway. At the club’s urging, the City Council established a three-member Park and Tree Board that was to have “free rein” in handling all matters having to do with street trees and the vegetation in parks (*South Coast News*, November 3, 1933). Photographs of newly built houses in “the Laguna spirit” were often prominently featured in the pages of *Laguna Beach Life*, along with renderings and floor plans of ready-cut houses “suitable for Laguna.” The new headquarters of the Chamber of Commerce built in 1925 was designed by the painter Frank Cuprien to “harmonize with the natural beauties of the town” (Laguna Beach Historical Society 1992).

The Chamber of Commerce was standing in for local government at the time, and when a need for services (for example, a fire truck, restrooms at the beach, water, sewerage) was perceived it took on the task of raising the funds and organizing the community to get those services provided. A letter to *Laguna Beach Life* from Joe and Guy Skidmore argued that incorporation as a city would spread the cost of improvements more equitably (*Laguna Beach Life*, July 15, 1921). Another argument for incorporation, voiced by Frank Cuprien at the Woman’s Club meeting mentioned above, was that it would permit creating a building code to control the look of the town as it grew (*Laguna Beach Life*, February 13, 1925). According to Don Meadows (1963, 250), Laguna Beach in these years was

an art colony in which the temperament of the artist was being submerged by business and progress. To save the distinctive features of the community, the older residents, who fondly called themselves “Lagunatics,” started a movement for incorporation. A vote was put before the people and with little opposition the City of Laguna Beach was incorporated in June 1927. . . . People with the Laguna spirit were placed in office and the town went ahead with physical improvements while retaining the atmosphere of the old art colony.

After its incorporation, the city’s first improvement district was a comprehensive sewage treatment system to preclude contamination of the beach. The *South Coast News* (February 1931) printed a rendering of the building as it would appear when completed that reportedly “caused several people who did not like the idea of a plant of this nature being erected in Laguna Canyon to change their ideas.” The headline read “NEW LAGUNA SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT IS ATTRACTIVE IN DESIGN.” The building was Mediterranean in style, and the sewer digester tower (which remains today and is on the city’s historic register) had a circular staircase at the top and was roofed with red Spanish tiles. The vent that still stands high on the hillside behind it, which looks like a lighthouse, has a similar roof. A survey of public works buildings at the time (Short and Stanley-Brown 1939, 461) identified the structures as “a departure in the design of a treatment plant,” and Charles Epting (2014, 122) has described the building as “the most interesting sewage treatment plant in the county” for its “artistic design.”

M. F. K. Fisher, writing from Laguna Beach (disguised as the fictional “Olas”), wrote in 1934 (Fisher 1982 [1935], 63):

Artists, old settlers, young enthusiasts for life in the raw with no hate and no golf clubs, want to keep it just as it is. . . . Olas’ other lovers, just as sincerely, want to exploit to the bursting point its strong and attractive character. . . .







*Main Street, Laguna*  
(Clarence Hinkle)  
1918 – FOAPAC

Streets are being smoothed and straightened. Old eucalyptus trees . . . are being smoothed and straightened. Old eucalyptus trees are uprooted to make way for curbing. “Desecration!” the artists shriek. “Necessity,” soothe the progressives, and they plant more trees in much more orderly rows.

The April 1930 issue of a local magazine called *The Racket* (quoted in Murphine 1980) expressed the concerns of some early residents about the growth of the city:

What we want is for those who are determining what Laguna is to be at present, and how it will be in the future, to be a bit careful what they do. Laguna HAS lost its charm of 10 years ago. People came here too rapidly and did things too rapidly. . . . They put in improvements not thinking that the improvements might be ugly and detract from the natural beauty of the place. . . . We believe what Laguna needs now, more than ever, is to develop an aesthetic sense—an ideal of beauty combined with utility.

Another local observer, C. E. C. Burnett, promoted a practical solution:

The town is changing. It is no longer a little artists’ colony. [There are] hundreds of us who, though not artists, appreciate the beauty of the community and its cultural surroundings. . . . Scientific city planning is our only salvation. Without it the beauty with which nature has endowed us will be marred almost beyond repair.

As commercial establishments increased in number, he explained, they were understandably moving from the downtown basin north and south on the Coast Boulevard (a garage on the corner of Jasmine Street, a real estate office on Cliff Drive, a super service station on the corner of Myrtle Street), and this was causing “howls” from residents about the intrusion. He saw zoning as the solution and recommended that readers write the Chamber of Commerce calling for a zoning survey (*South Coast News*, February 24, 1933).





*Hotel Laguna, Coast Highway (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*

These community concerns led to the passage of three urgency ordinances, two in 1928 and another in 1936, that established an “A” zone (essentially the downtown basin), in which business was permitted, and a “B” zone (the rest of the town), in which only residences, hotels, churches, clubs, and educational or philanthropic institutions were allowed. The City Council retained the authority to permit an otherwise unpermitted use and might hold a public hearing to help determine whether that was proper. The 1936 ordinance set a 50 percent maximum lot coverage in the residential zone and established side yard requirements and a minimum lot size of 1,900 square feet.

The city’s first Land Use Plan, Ordinance 209, adopted in 1940, replaced the provisions of these early ordinances with a scheme of residential, commercial, and industrial zones graded by intensity of occupation and was designed to “regulate and restrict the height and bulk of buildings and to regulate the area of yards, courts, and other open spaces about buildings” (City of Laguna Beach 1940).



*Lumberyard Building, Forest Avenue (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*





*Cope Residence, Glenneyre and Park Avenue (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*



Building heights were limited to two stories or 30' except in the general business and industrial districts, where the maximum was four stories or 50'. Exceptions were specified for rooftop architectural features, and for buildings on a 25 percent slope a third story on the downhill side might be permitted. The minimum size of a building site in the R-1 district was set at 6,000 square feet. By this time there was a planning commission, and it was charged with making judgments on requests for variances and adjustments. A permit from the building inspector was required for new construction and alterations of or additions to existing buildings.

The city's first General Plan, developed through public meetings inviting community input and adopted in January 1959, included among its goals the following (City of Laguna Beach 1959, 1):

The city should continue to be both a residential and a resort community—and these divergent identities should be smoothly blended. The physical beauty of the area, especially of the coastline, should be preserved. Energetic effort should be made to maintain Laguna's individuality and identity. Over-all, the esthetic appeal of the city should be accentuated.

The plan recommended “keeping residential and commercial development in the central area low, consistent with the established character of Laguna. . . . Tall buildings imply ‘metropolis’—an image which is in conflict with the ‘village’ character of Laguna Beach which this plan seeks to maintain and enhance” (p. 13). It also recommended that Main Beach be extended to the Coast Highway and “developed for controlled community use” (p. 27).

The idea of public acquisition of the Main Beach had been discussed since before the city was incorporated, and bond issues were submitted to voters in 1955 and in 1959 but fell just short of the required two-thirds majority.





*Office and shops, Coast Highway, South Laguna (Ann Christoph) 2016*



Part of the impetus for these efforts was the threat of large commercial structures. One of these had been approved by the planning commission in 1958 and the approval reversed by the city council after a public outcry. In 1968 a nonprofit corporation was formed to issue thirty-year bonds for the park, to be paid off with the Festival of Arts's lease payments for Irvine Bowl, and the property was purchased for the city.

By this time development was reaching southern Orange County, and so was the nationwide environmental revolution, producing Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature* (1969), the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, Earth Day, the passage of the California Environmental Quality Act in 1970, and the establishment of the California Coastal Commission in 1972. Laguna Beach citizens were inspired by this new thinking. (At the invitation of the local landscape architect Fred Lang, Ian McHarg came to speak to the Citizens' Town Planning Association in the early 1970s.) In response to the threat of inappropriate development, they adopted a set of measures to preserve and enhance their natural and built environments that has survived to this day.

South Laguna citizens, inspired by the threat of development on what was then a private beach, persuaded the Orange County board of supervisors to buy Aliso Beach. Access standards to control and slow development were established in 1964, and the city set a population limit of 24,000 and rezoned multifamily properties to match that objective.

In 1965 the University of California, Irvine, opened its campus, bringing new ideas to Laguna Beach with the faculty members who came to live in the city. "The UCI people inserted another point of view into the community dialog. They could frame issues from an academic perspective" (Randy Lewis, personal communication, October 9, 2015).





*Water District building, Third Street (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*



They added substance and activism to Laguna's planning efforts, often focused on preserving open space and the traditional village character of the town.

In the late 1960s Laguna Beach began to be dramatically influenced by the social changes going on throughout the country. A liberal-minded counterculture, influenced by the university and art environment, was emerging. It emphasized harmony with nature, social justice, communal living, artistic experimentation, musical transformation, search for enlightenment, promotion of peace, and drug exploration. It became visible with the long-haired youth movement. In 1965 the Sawdust Art Festival, with its casually styled booths and innovative art, was started as a counterpoint to the more traditional Festival of the Arts. A controversial group called the Brotherhood of Eternal Love moved to Laguna Canyon, which became its headquarters for distribution of psychedelic drugs including LSD, marijuana, and hashish. These drugs were initially promoted as tools for enlightenment, but the operation soon became a worldwide illicit drug enterprise. The Brotherhood also founded Mystic Arts World, a hippie boutique that included a gallery of psychedelic art, curated by Dion Wright, one of the original exhibitors at the Sawdust Art Festival.

At Christmastime in 1970 a "happening" that was billed as a spiritual awakening was held in Laguna Canyon. It attracted an estimated 25,000 participants for what has been described as "Woodstock West." The event was tolerated for three days before it was dramatically closed down by the city with the support of law enforcement from across Orange County. A strict drug enforcement policy was subsequently enacted.

This was a critical time for the city, and, while many saw the crackdown as the end of the "hippie era" in Laguna Beach, the ideas spawned by the 1960s movement had taken hold in the community. When subsequent plans were promoted





*Canyon Reach* (John H. Hinchman) 1925 – LAM

for massive development of the coastal region for tourist hotels, the citizenry resoundingly rejected the proposals and launched an active campaign for preservation of the village character of Laguna Beach. These attitudes prevail to this day and are manifested in the many environmental preservationist groups still active in the city.

Consultants were hired in 1967 to update the city's general plan, and they presented the city with a plan that included resort development, with triple the population, and a coastal freeway. After a public hearing at which Laguna Beach residents rejected this proposal, a 23-member citizens' advisory committee came up with different goals (City of Laguna Beach 1969; McElroy 1971), including maintaining the integrity of the contour of the hills and of the coastline, preserving natural wilderness, maintaining a village atmosphere, preserving a community of individuality and diversity, regulating the height and mass of buildings, and respecting urban aesthetics.

A high-rise hotel was in fact built on Laguna's oceanfront in those years, having received a variance to build to 58'. (Maximum building heights in the city's two commercial zones were 30' and 50' at the time.) In the planning commission's hearings on the proposal in January 1971, a maximum height of 70' was being considered. One of those hearings drew some 250 people, all but a few opposed to the idea. As Phyllis Sweeney later wrote,

The citizens were outraged. Residents stormed the Planning Commission meetings. At one meeting, Judy Ronaky, the Commission clerk, read 47 letters in opposition. The commissioners' response was that the objections were from only a small vocal minority. No one would listen. People were meeting in each other's homes. Arnold [Hano], Fran [Englehardt], Joyce Dusenberry, and others formed a committee.

Other members of this early group, already calling itself Village Laguna, were Roger McErlane, Bill Leak, Thomasina Gunn, Joe Tomchak, Nate Rynn, Mildred Hannum, and Corky Smith. Eventually the planning commission settled on a 50' maximum height, and before the recommendation could reach the City Council a citizens' group of five filed a notice of intention to circulate petitions for an initiative that would modify the building code to limit buildings citywide to 36' above the highest point of grade. The attorney Ralph Benson, the engineer Merritt Trease, the environmental biologist Philip Rundel, Arnold Hano, and Marjory Adams Darling signed the notice, which appeared in the *Laguna News-Post* on February 13. Then, when the required waiting period was over, volunteers, led by Phyllis Sweeney, began collecting signatures. The goal was 1,140 signatures, 15 percent of the city's registered voters, and in the end 3,049 signatures were certified as valid. Faced with these figures at its May 19 meeting, the City Council called a special election to decide the issue on August 3. On election day, 62 percent (4,920) of Laguna's registered voters turned out (a record, according to the City Clerk), and 75 percent of them voted yes (*Laguna News Post*, August 4, 1971; Village Laguna 2011).

When the time came for the city to develop its Local Coastal Plan under the California Coastal Commission, the city council decided to have nearly all of the city (excluding only Sycamore Hills), instead of simply the first 1,000 feet from the shoreline, included in the coastal zone to achieve an additional layer of protection. Preparations for an update of the General Plan resulted in the adoption of the first Land Use Element in 1972. The current version, adopted in 2012, addresses the following goals among others: create a community that is sustainable, resilient, and regenerative; preserve, enhance, and respect the unique character and identity of Laguna's residential neighborhoods; preserve, enhance, and respect the unique, small-scale village





*Contemporary Laguna and its greenbelt, showing the boundaries of the Historic American Landscape*

## Historic American Landscape

### Survey:

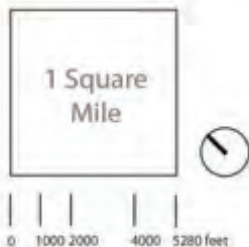
*The Laguna  
Greenbelt Open  
Space Preserve  
Laguna Beach,  
California*

The Laguna Greenbelt is comprised of the following public open space:

- A Laguna Coast Wilderness Park
- B Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park
- C Crystal Cove State Park
- D City of Irvine Open Space Preserve
- E City of Laguna Beach Open Space
- F Orange County Transportation Authority

#### HALS - CA123

Prepared By  
Committee for Preservation of the Laguna Legacy  
WALLBRYSTUDIO



character and individual identity of Laguna Beach's commercial areas; and protect, preserve, and enhance the community's natural resources.

The Open Space and Conservation Element, adopted in 1973 and most recently amended in 2005, contains descriptions of the city's natural surroundings and detailed policies for, among other things, the maintenance of the shoreline in its natural state, the protection of tide pools and marine habitats, the improvement of public access ways to the beaches, the development of trails, the preservation of the canyon wilderness, the preservation of public views from the hillsides and along the shoreline, the preservation and restoration of natural drainage channels, streams, lakes, and marshes, and the preservation of steep slopes and natural topographic features. The implementation of one of its policies, "Encourage inaccessible hillside property to be dedicated to the city as permanent open space," began with the approval of Tract 10054 on Park Avenue and Alta Laguna Boulevard and Tract 7367 between Skyline Drive and Pacific Avenue in 1982. Citizen devotion and activism has produced a number of city parks—Heisler Park in the 1920s, Bluebird Park in the 1950s, Main Beach Park in the 1960s, Village Green in the 1970s, and Treasure Island Park in the 1990s.

A heritage tree ordinance, adopted in 1975 and amended in 1998, recognizes and protects trees of large size, historical significance, or unique appearance. The protection of these trees is accomplished through a permit process that reviews proposals for major pruning, removal, or construction close to the trees. A list of heritage trees prepared in 1995 included 42 trees; now there are 113. The Landscape and Scenic Highways Resource Document, adopted in 1995 and now in the process of being converted into an element of the General Plan (City of Laguna Beach n.d.), offered a profile of the landscaping associated with each of the city's distinctive neighborhoods and a series of suggestions for



maintaining and enhancing it, including information on water conservation, fire safety, view preservation, soil stability, and control of invasive plants.

The Historic Resources Element, adopted in 1981 and amended in 2006, has as its objectives to preserve and enhance structures of historic significance in Laguna Beach and ensure that neighborhoods with a preponderance of older homes be maintained as cohesive units through consistency of size, scale, and character; to encourage an appreciation of history and historic preservation in the city; and to promote community awareness of local history and enhance recognition of the city's historic role as an important art colony and seaside resort. An inventory of historic resources produced with federal, state, and county funding under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act identified more than 700 houses eligible for listing on the city's historic register, and some 300 homes are now protected by such listing.

In a survey conducted by the League of Women Voters of Orange Coast in February 1980 on the future of Laguna Beach, 83.5 percent of the 1,137 respondents chose 20,000 as the target population for the city (which had 16,000 at the time) and 60.2 percent said they would like to see tight restrictions on new building to reduce the impact of traffic and noise on existing residential areas, avoid extending existing roads, preserve the natural contours of the hillsides, and control the costs of additional police and fire protection, schools, and infrastructure (League of Women Voters of Orange Coast 1971).

To implement the policies contained in the General and Specific Plans, the city established design review of proposed development in 1972, excluding for the moment single-family residences. In response to

neighborhood concerns about out-of-scale development, the design review requirement was extended to residences in 1986. (Additions to single-family residences less than 50 percent of the gross floor area that do not create a new upper story or exceed 15' above the adjacent ground elevation and are not in environmentally sensitive areas are exempt.) The city's "Design Guidelines: A Guide to Residential Development" (2010) summarizes the General Plan policies that apply. The design criteria specified in the zoning code include, in addition to General Plan compliance, access, design articulation, design integrity, environmental context, historic preservation, landscaping, lighting and glare, neighborhood compatibility, privacy, public art, sustainability, water features, and view equity.

The Downtown Specific Plan, adopted in 1989 and most recently amended in 2008, was designed to protect the downtown's eclectic mix of architectural styles, small-scale buildings, pedestrian orientation, rich variety of shops and services, and sense of community. The plan describes the "unique charm of the downtown" as, "in no small measure, created by its physical setting as well as by the small scale and diversity of building styles. That the downtown basin is located on the flat delta area at the mouth of Laguna Canyon, surrounded by steep canyons and bordered by the Pacific shoreline with only two roads providing access, established a physical separation from other regions of the city and contributes to the area's having a special identity" (City of Laguna Beach 2008, II-1). New uses in the downtown are subject to a conditional use permit to allow the planning commission to maintain a variety that serves both visitor and resident needs. Building heights in the plan area are limited to 12' (though

two-story buildings exist there) to ensure the preservation of a varied and pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

A planning process called Vision 2030 funded by the city and involving some 2,000 residents concluded in 2001 that one of Laguna's "core values" was that "Lagunans accept the responsibility of stewardship for the town we love, for both its people and its environment, and are willing to commit to its preservation and enhancement." Its proposals for future design enhancements included integrating Laguna Creek into a naturalistic stream through the downtown and the village entrance; developing a program to preserve the character, uniqueness, and diversity of individual neighborhoods; publishing a manual describing the unique characteristics of Laguna, its history, and its philosophical attitudes; expanding the city's efforts at historic preservation; systematically increasing the amount of open space in and around the city; and ensuring that landscape features throughout Laguna are rigorously maintained and preserved (City of Laguna Beach 2001).





*Lifeguard tower, Main Beach, Coast Highway (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*



*Shop, Coast Highway* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Water District building, Third Street* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016





*Monument Point looking South* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Picnic Beach looking North* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016





*Laguna Beach* (Clarence Hinkle) 1929 - LAM



*Seascape* (Clarence Hinkle) Ca. 1918 – FOAPAC





## The Greenbelt and the Bluebelt

In 1968 James W. Dilley, the owner of a local bookstore and founding member of the Citizens' Town Planning Association, set up a subcommittee called Citizens for the Greenbelt that circulated a petition titled "A Matter of Urgency" calling for support for the idea of a greenbelt surrounding the city. The subcommittee became Laguna Greenbelt, Inc., in 1970. Dilley persuaded the Orange County supervisors to adopt the concept of the Laguna Greenbelt in 1971, and in 1973 the concept was given priority in the Open Space Element of the Orange County General Plan. The California Coastal Commission recognized the greenbelt concept in 1975 (Laguna Greenbelt n.d.).

The 1970s and 1980s saw recurrent citizen efforts that led to a spate of additions to the Laguna Greenbelt: Sycamore Hills in 1978, Aliso, Wood, and Mathis Canyons, 80 acres in Laguna Beach's Top of the World area, other properties in Laguna Beach, and 2,888 acres of beach and back-country land, including Moro Canyon, between Laguna Beach and Newport Beach, in 1979. In the 1980s with the leadership of Fred Lang and the South Laguna Civic Association a 20-acre parcel south of upper Three Arch Bay, 130+ acres on the slopes of Niguel Hill, and hillside properties including Badlands Park were dedicated as open space. After Jim Dilley's death in 1980, Tom Alexander became president of the Laguna Greenbelt, and with Larry Ulvestad he advanced the idea of establishing an Orange Coast National Park that would consolidate the coastal area from Laguna Beach to Corona del Mar. All the pieces of legislation were in place when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980 and his opposition to park legislation in general caused the Laguna project to collapse. Fortunately, the state stepped in at this point and acquired the area now known as Crystal Cove State Park.



*Canyon Hills* (William Griffith)  
1935 - CLB





*Canyon Light on The Tell* (Jerry Burchfield and Mark Chamberlain) 1989



*The Laguna Canyon Project - The Tell* (Jerry Burchfield and Mark Chamberlain) 1989

Although the struggle to save Sycamore Hills had ended with its purchase, preventing the construction of 2,000 homes there, Laguna Canyon was not yet safe from development. The Irvine Company had secured approval for the construction of 3,200 homes on 2,150 acres in the canyon, and despite public opposition the project appeared inevitable. In 1980 the photographers Jerry Burchfield and Mark Chamberlain, who recognized the canyon as the last remaining natural corridor to the ocean in Orange County and one of the largest open spaces in Southern California, initiated the documentation of the threat to its survival. They set out to photograph, day and night, every inch of the nine miles from the Santa Ana Freeway to the ocean at ten-year intervals (1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010). Their aim was “to bring the area into sharper focus as a microcosm of a larger universe and, hopefully, elevate the discussion regarding the definitions and connotations of ‘progress’ in today’s world” (Chamberlain 1988, 17).

In 1989 Burchfield and Chamberlain conceived and coordinated the mounting in Sycamore Hills of a 636'-long public mural named *The Tell*, made up of 100,000 photographs contributed by the community, and held a public rally against the future development (Chamberlain n.d.). The Great Walk to the mural drew an estimated 8,000–10,000 people and served as a catalyst for saving the canyon. The protest soon resulted in an agreement between Laguna Beach and the Irvine Company for the city’s acquisition of five canyon parcels. A city bond measure approved by almost 80 percent of Laguna voters raised \$20 million toward the purchase price of \$78 million by means of a property tax increase on every property in the city for 20 years (Laguna Greenbelt n.d.).

Two major highway construction projects brought landform changes to the canyon landscape that were protested by Lagunans to no avail, but in both cases Laguna Beach citizens’ concerns received some consideration. The six-lane San Joaquin Hills Toll Road, built in the mid-1990s, was

the subject of the February 1992 Great Laguna Canyon Cover-up, when an estimated 2,000 participants lined up along Laguna Canyon Road holding up sheets to mark the eventual width of the highway. About 500 people hiked from Laguna Beach’s Top of the World to join the rally, following the planned route of the highway (*Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1992). The Laguna Canyon Conservancy, which organized the event and had also been decisive in mobilizing the 1989 Walk, collected signatures from people promising to boycott the toll road if it was built, and today there are still Lagunans who are keeping that promise. The right-of-way, however, belonged to Orange County as a result of the arrangement to purchase Sycamore Hills, and despite vigorous opposition by the city and legal action by the Laguna Greenbelt and the Laguna Canyon Conservancy the road was built.

The widening of Laguna Canyon Road from near the 405 Freeway to just north of the toll road had long been pursued by the county and opposed by the city. (The original plan had been for a freeway, but the alignment for that had been rescinded in 1976.) The sales agreement for the canyon had, however, included the understanding that the road would be widened, and in 1992 the county established a committee with representatives from the cities of Laguna Beach and Irvine, the California Department of Transportation, the homeowners’ associations of Leisure World and Aliso Viejo, the Irvine Company, and the Laguna Beach environmental and business communities to review potential alternatives for the roadway (LSA Associates, Inc. 1992). After a year and a half it came up with a plan for a realigned four-lane road that avoided the canyon’s lakes and included three wildlife undercrossings (*Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1994). The plan had a split-grade design to minimize grading, undergrounding of utilities, no street lights, minimal signage, minimization of roadway cut slopes, and planting with native grasses, shrubs, and trees (LSA Associates, Inc. 1992). The public response to the environmental impact report on the road proposal in 1994 led to the establishment of the





*The Viking Studio* (Virginia Woolley) 1930 – LAM

Laguna Canyon Road Design Oversight Committee, composed of Laguna Beach residents, which over a period of years supervised the road's eventual design (Sutliff 2001). The road widening was completed in 2006. The abandoned section of the road is still visible to the east, marked at one point by a line of trees said to have been planted by the plein air painter Anna Hills in the city's very early days. The community continues to oppose any widening of Laguna Canyon Road oceanward of El Toro Road. This is a policy of the Land Use Element of the General Plan, and public support for it was reaffirmed by the conclusions of a task force convened to consider possible road improvements in September 2015.

The continuing efforts of the Laguna Canyon Conservancy, founded by Councilmember Lida Lenney and long led by Carolyn Wood, and the fundraising of the Laguna Canyon Foundation, founded in 1990, under executive director Mary Fegraus and president Michael Pinto, kept interest in land acquisition alive. The gift by the Irvine Company in November 2001 of a 173-acre parcel that the city had agreed to purchase but had been unable to fund completed the acquisitions desired by the thousands of Lagunans who had walked to Sycamore Hills to preserve the canyon a decade earlier. The 2000 Parks Bond Act, a state ballot initiative for which Laguna Beach residents (Laguna Greenbelt, the Laguna Canyon Conservancy, and Village Laguna) collected signatures brought the city \$12 million for parks and open space, facilitating further purchases in Laguna Canyon and in the city's interior canyons until the money was depleted near the end of the decade. A report on the city's open space acquisitions since 1979 prepared by the city manager (Frank 2010) includes some 3,100 acres at a cost to the city of \$35,162,000. An initiative sponsored by the Laguna Greenbelt, the Laguna Canyon Conservancy, Village Laguna, the Temple Hills Community Association, the Top of the World Neighborhood Association, and the South Laguna Civic Association that would have created a parcel

tax to fund the purchase of land to add to the inner greenbelt received 45 percent of the vote in 2012. Even though the initiative failed to pass, since then there have been additional purchases by the city, including 56 acres in Rimrock Canyon. Today only some 400 acres of naturally vegetated hillsides and canyons within the city limits remain in private hands. At the urging of the former city manager, Ken Frank, and others, the city council voted in 2015 to consider allocating \$300,000 every year for ten years to the Open Space Fund for the purchase and maintenance of open space.

In an effort to preserve the plant and animal life of the intertidal zone, the city initiated action to create a state-protected marine preserve along part of its shoreline in 1968. This was followed in 1974 by the creation of the Glenn E. Vedder Ecological Reserve, along the base of Heisler Park, in which marine life, plants, large fish, shells, and rocks cannot be removed or disturbed except for scientific study (City of Laguna Beach 2006). The Friends of the Sea Lion (now the Pacific Marine Mammal Center), which rescues, rehabilitates, and releases marine mammals, was founded by Laguna lifeguards Jim Stauffer and John Cunningham and veterinarian Rose Ekeberg in 1971. In 1976 the city offered the organization a barn in Laguna Canyon recently vacated by the SPCA, and the program continues there with heavy involvement by volunteers to this day (Pacific Marine Mammal Center 2015).

In the wake of destructive storms in the winter of 1983, the city undertook a study of its distinctive coastline that became known as the "Guidelines for Shoreline Protection" (1988). The study's introduction described the need to balance the public's desire for sandy beaches for recreational purposes against the desire of the private sector to protect its shorefront property and found the two desires closely related: "The stewardship of this land should minimize any actions that tend to diminish this valuable resource, thereby not only protecting the long-term economic value of the property but





*Sea Grass King Tide* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Beach Terraces* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Bird Rock , Main Beach* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Study for My Citadel* (Frank Cuprien) 1925 – LAM



*Spring in the Canyon* (William Wendt) 1926 – LAM

also preserving the first line of defense against wave attack” (City of Laguna Beach 1988, 1). The research revealed that fully a third of the city’s beach frontage was backed by some kind of structural device and that these devices were often in distress, were causing accelerated scour on either side to the detriment of neighboring properties, and raised fundamental aesthetic questions. The General Plan already prohibited new shoreline protection devices unless there was clear evidence that existing structures were in danger from erosion and unless they were designed to eliminate or mitigate adverse impacts on the local shoreline sand supply. The “Guidelines” spelled out the design considerations for evaluating proposals for new devices and made recommendations for monitoring beach behavior over time.

In the late 2000s, following the state legislature’s passage of the Marine Life Protection Act in 1999, the opportunity to have Laguna’s coastal waters included in a network of state marine protected areas engaged the community’s attention. With leadership from the Laguna Bluebelt Coalition, the city council voted to ask that the entire coastline of the city be given protection. After an intense two-year campaign, three marine protected areas were designated off Laguna’s coast for a five-year period: a marine reserve (the highest protection) from Abalone Point to Aliso Beach, a no-take marine conservation area (in which no marine life may be killed but in which the sewer outfall pipe can continue to operate) from Aliso Beach to Secret Cove, and a marine conservation area with less protection from Secret Cove to the Dana Point Headlands. All the tidepools from Crystal Cove to Dana Point were given the protection of a marine reserve. The Laguna Bluebelt Coalition conducts advocacy and education about local marine resources and assists in the enforcement of environmental protection and ocean water quality regulations. Another local environmental organization, the Laguna Ocean Foundation, founded in 2003 in response to the Vision 2030 process mentioned earlier, runs a tidepool docent program that has trained more than 200 volunteers to provide interpretive education in local intertidal areas.





*Sunset #3* (Frank Cuprien) 1936 – LAM



*Sunset #2* (Frank Cuprien) 1938 – LAM



*Untitled, sunset* (Frank Cuprien) 1929 – LAM



*Laguna Sunset (study)* (Frank Cuprien) 1930 - LAM



*Golden Shores, Laguna Beach* (Carl Oscar Borg) 1920 – LAM

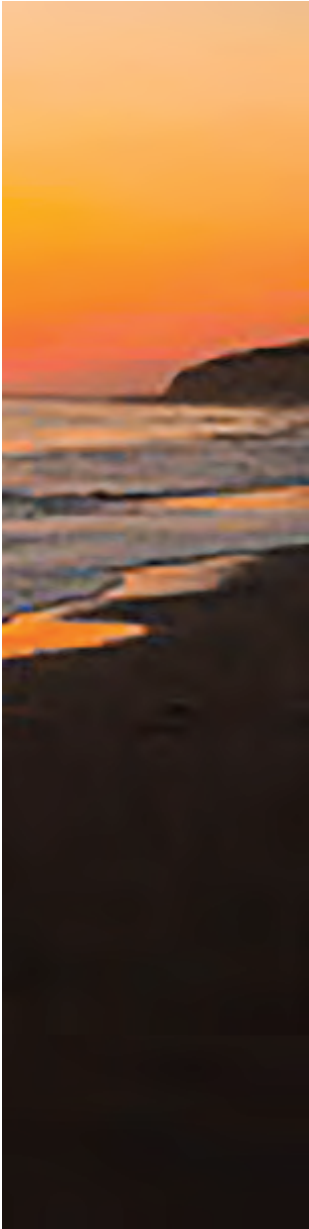




## The Landscape

The San Joaquin Hills are a defining feature of Laguna Beach. Extending from just south of the city boundary near Salt Creek to north of Crystal Cove, they separate the alluvial plain (the former agricultural area) of Orange County from the coast. Laguna's outcrops, cliffs, boulders, sea caves, and arches are the visible expression of the underlying geological structure, composed primarily of Topanga sandstone and San Onofre breccia. The unusual volcanic intrusion that forms Abalone Knoll also creates the vertical post-pile formation that is exposed in Irvine Cove at the north end of the city, Seal Rock, and the cliffs near Crescent Bay.

The enclaves formed by these hills are the basis for the city's character. The slopes on the coastal side are composed of terrace material eroded over the years from the hillsides and include relatively deep soils that were farmed by early homesteaders. They were among the first to be developed, as they were easy to reach and build upon. The coastal terrace, traversed by the Coast Highway and flanked by urban development, terminates at wave-cut sea cliffs that may rise to nearly 140'



*Sunset* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*The Golden Hour, Laguna Beach*  
(Frank Cuprien) 1923 – LAM



above sea level. The alluvial central basin was formed with the rise of sea level after the last ice age and was swampy when the first settlers arrived in the area. The summits of the hills at Top of the World, Arch Beach Heights, and South Laguna are capped with sandy marine terraces reflecting uplift from sea beds millions of years ago. An 1885 topographic map illustrates the underlying landforms and drainage that are the basis for many of the city's development patterns (U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey 1885).

Ranch boundaries and the constraints posed by local hillsides and canyons discouraged or precluded development and created the opportunity for the conservation of the large areas of preserved open space. What is now known as the Laguna Greenbelt encompasses some 22,000 acres within and outside of the city limits and includes city-owned open space parcels, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, Crystal Cove State Park, and Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park. Approximately 400 acres of privately owned land remain in naturally vegetated open space on the edge of urban development, mostly adjacent to publicly owned open space lands. Along with natural open space, Laguna Beach has community and neighborhood parks that define the local landscape. These include Heisler Park, Main Beach Park, Treasure Island Park, Alta Laguna Park, Moulton Meadows Park, Lang Park, Bluebird Park, Riddle Field, and a number of neighborhood pocket parks throughout the city (City of Laguna Beach 2015; Borthwick 2015; County of Orange 2006).

The Laguna Greenbelt is one of the last remaining sanctuaries for many plants native to southern California. About 100 species are found in Laurel and Willow Canyons alone. The area supports a variety of native southern California wildlife, including mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, and mule deer and more than 100 species of birds. Sensitive species in the area include California gnatcatcher, cactus wren, orange-throated whiptail, and coast horned lizard. Laguna Beach is part of an ecological "hotspot," one of twenty-six in the world so designated because of the diversity of their habitats and

species (Brown 2002). (Mediterranean habitat covers only 2 percent of the earth's surface but contains some 20 percent of its species.) Its San Onofre breccia areas, mostly in the southern part of the city, are favorable for southern maritime chaparral, a globally rare vegetation association known as "elfin forest." This association includes plants that are normally found in disparate areas of inland California and Mexico, among them California lilac, mountain mahogany, scrub oak, toyon, laurel sumac, chamise, and lemonade berry, as well as smaller shrubs such as bladderpod and bush rue, alongside the summer-deciduous crownbeard, sages, and sagebrush. An endemic succulent, Laguna Beach dudleya, occupies niches in the rocky cliffs. The drier areas of the city underlain by Topanga sandstone support coastal sage scrub, with sage, sagebrush, prickly pear cactus, lemonade berry, laurel sumac, and toyon. Coast live oaks and Mexican elderberry grow in spots where water collects or flows.

The two principal streams that flow through Laguna Beach—Laguna Canyon Creek and Aliso Creek—have produced canyons that reveal the two major geological formations of the town. In Laguna Canyon large sandstone boulders, caves, and cliffs of the Topanga formation provide habitats for California sycamores, coast live oaks, and coastal sagebrush. The blue-gray conglomerate San Onofre breccia formation at Aliso Canyon is hard enough to support vertical and overhanging cliffs, producing the escarpments that have led Aliso Canyon to be described as "Laguna's Yosemite." Smaller streams and their arroyos originating in the local hills bisect the coastal landscape and are reflected in the undulating patterns of the city's street system.

Laguna Canyon is approximately 8 miles long and 1 mile wide at its widest points. Its hillsides have fairly shallow soils and thus support mostly shallow-rooted coastal sagebrush. The flat canyon bottoms have somewhat deeper soils and support California sycamores, coast live oaks, and arroyo willow, along with larger native shrubs such as toyon. Similar vegetation probably once grew in the lower reaches of Aliso Canyon,



*Landscape* (William Wendt) 1912 – LAM



but it was more intensely farmed and grazed. Part is now a golf course. In Aliso Canyon coastal sage scrub is widespread on the slopes, southern maritime chaparral near the coast, and annual grassland primarily along Aliso Creek, in lower Wood Canyon, and at Moulton Meadows. Riparian vegetation and grassy wetlands/marsh are found along the length of the creek, and significant concentrations of native grasses occur in the western portions of the wilderness park. Sensitive species include many-stemmed dudleya, Pomona rattleweed, Orange County Turkish rugging, Palmer's grapplinghook, aphanisma, Western dichondra, Laguna Beach dudleya, scrub oak, hummingbird sage, ocean spray, and crownbeard. The wilderness park also serves as refuge for, in addition to the sensitive species mentioned above, the Southwestern pond turtle, the Pacific pocket mouse, the great egret, the black-shouldered kite, the Northern harrier, the sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, the ferruginous hawk, the yellow warbler, and the yellow-breasted chat.



*Pattern Lake* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010





*Laguna Beach* (Frederick Melville DuMond) 1911 - LAM





## The Community

Throughout the city's history, its physical shape, with its enclosed downtown, where residents often meet face to face, has contributed to its sense of community. (It's reported that, when home mail delivery replaced the distribution of the mail at the post office every evening, people complained that they missed that daily gathering.) This self-containment is reflected socially in the proliferation of homegrown community organizations in the arts (the Laguna Playhouse, the three summer art festivals, the craft guild, and several concert series and once a ballet company and a chamber music society) and in the area of human needs (the community clinic, founded in 1970; an HIV/AIDS services agency that has since outgrown its local premises and moved to a neighboring community; a youth shelter; a long-term homeless shelter and an overnight sleeping location (the latter funded by the city but dependent for food service on community volunteers); a residence for developmentally disabled young adults; a support group for the library; an English-as-a-second-language program with free child care; a managed day workers' center; and a food distribution center). It is also reflected in the community's wholehearted compassionate response to victims of the periodic natural disasters—floods, landslides, and wildfires—that are part of life in Laguna Beach.

The way Laguna Beach looks today reflects the diverse conditions of its natural environment. Thirteen subareas including thirty-eight neighborhoods distinguished by their topography, scale, settlement and street patterns, landscape, and architecture have been identified in the Landscape and Scenic Highways Element of the General Plan (City of Laguna Beach n.d.). The uniqueness of these neighborhoods can be traced to the geographical and historical conditions of their settlement.



*Movie Theater,  
Coast Highway*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016





*Sewer Building, Laguna Canyon Road*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Verizon Building,  
Broadway and Beach*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016

In the late 1800s, much of the land that is now Laguna Beach, left out of the large ranches surrounding it, was still available to be claimed under various federal laws intended “to encourage the growth of timber on the western prairies.” The Timber Culture Act of 1873, 1874, and 1878 required an applicant for 160 acres to plant 15 acres to timber within four years. Eucalyptus trees, either blue gums (*Eucalyptus globulus*) or sugar gums (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*), were chosen as the timber crop,



*Saint Francis by the Sea, Park Avenue (Thomas A Lamb) 2016*

At the end of eight years after planting 2,700 trees per acre, the act required at least 675 trees to have survived. Because of the low rainfall, many of the claims in Laguna were much smaller than 160 acres, most covering about 40 acres. The Timber Culture patents granted in Laguna Beach were located where Thurston Middle School now stands (1895), Aliso Canyon beyond the golf course (1896), Old Top of the World (1898), and West Street and Paso del Sur (1910). Other homestead claims that resulted in the planting of groves were located in Thurston Park, Mystic Hills, Bluebird Canyon, at the eastern end of Aliso Canyon, at Third Avenue and Mar Vista, and at the top of Eighth Avenue at Hillhaven Ranch Way. Parts of these original groves still survive.

The oldest sections of Laguna Beach developed at the turn of the twentieth century. Small plots of homesteaded land were individually subdivided, patchwork-style, and often did not match the street patterns of adjacent parcels. There was no standardized tract development, no phasing of homes, and no overall master plan. Instead, development occurred gradually over time, influenced by the homestead and rancho boundaries, traditional small-town design approaches (the grid street system, ease of pedestrian access to shops and community services) and the artistic community, which emphasized aesthetics, creativity, and individuality.

The downtown and coastal shelf areas were developed first, from the late 1800s through the 1940s. These neighborhoods generally have a grid street system, with many streets taking access directly from Coast Highway. The pattern of streets parallel to the coastline with lots extending to the mean high tide line allows for easy and direct access to beaches, the highway, and downtown businesses, and it is an important component of the pedestrian-scale village ambiance. Bungalows and cottages, originally used as vacation homes, with informal, mature plantings provide a diverse and human-scale landscape.





*I. Barker, Center Street*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*H. Noppenberger, Mar Vista Avenue*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Halliburton house, South Laguna* (Ann Christoph) 2011



*Schroeder house, designed by Josef van der Kar using components produced by Gropius and Wachsmann* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016

In many pre-1960 neighborhoods, pads for residential construction were not graded when the streets were created. As a result, structures were designed to fit the topography, and this encouraged diverse architectural solutions. Varied street layouts reflecting multiple development approaches over time add to the diversity of the town. The resulting structures and roadway configurations contribute to the eclectic landscape and uniqueness of the city. After World War II, development of other neighborhoods was facilitated by the extension of city streets, including Park Avenue and Temple Hills Drive to Top of the World, Summit Drive, Alta Vista Way, and Nyes Place to Arch Beach Heights, and smaller-scale extensions such as Bluebird Canyon Drive and Paso del Sur. These newer neighborhoods, designed with curving streets and larger homes, generally do not have the pedestrian accessibility or small-scale character of the earlier ones. Dramatic views of the ocean, coastline, canyons, and town are prominent features. Over the past fifty years or so, plantings in these neighborhoods have matured, blending the architecture with its hillside setting (City of Laguna Beach n.d.).

The early beach houses of Laguna were basically permanent replacements of the early tent shelters, often constructed without foundations and usually single-walled. They were used primarily as weekend retreats from the city. By 1920, as the town had gained distinction as an art colony and vacation spot, the demand for services for vacationers increased, and those who had been seasonal residents began to make Laguna Beach their permanent home. Almost every house built in Laguna Beach before 1927 had its roots in the Craftsman tradition. In contrast to most cities, whose older buildings are concentrated near the city center, Laguna Beach was settled by people with a preference for the seclusion offered by open spaces, who often built in scattered locations away from the center of activity (City of Laguna Beach 1981, 14).

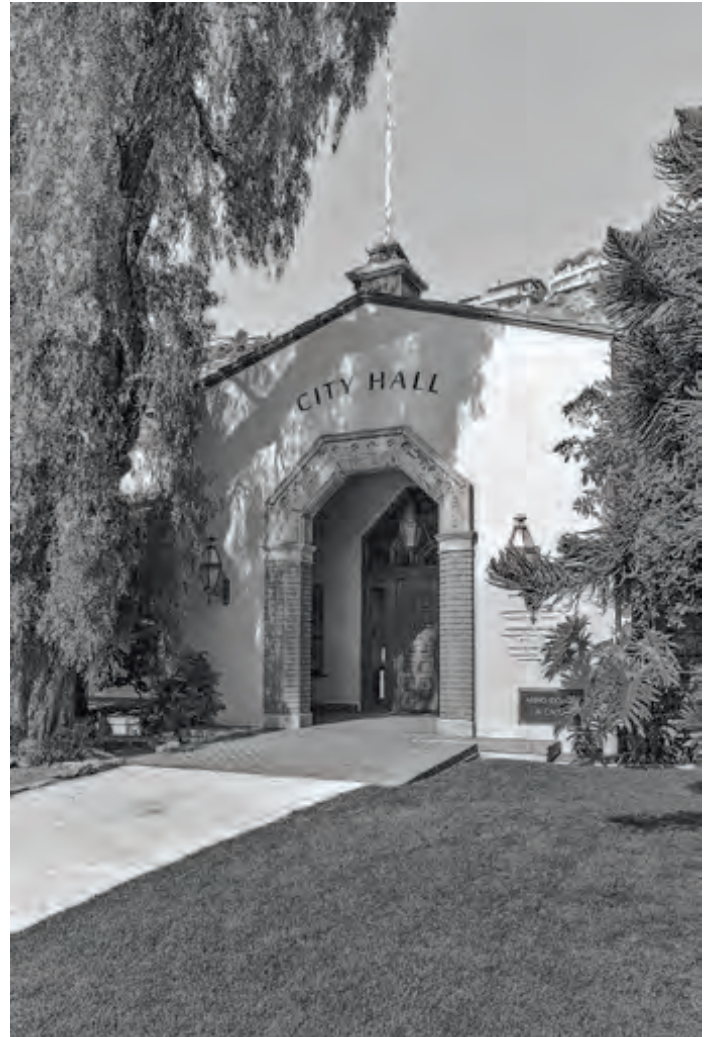




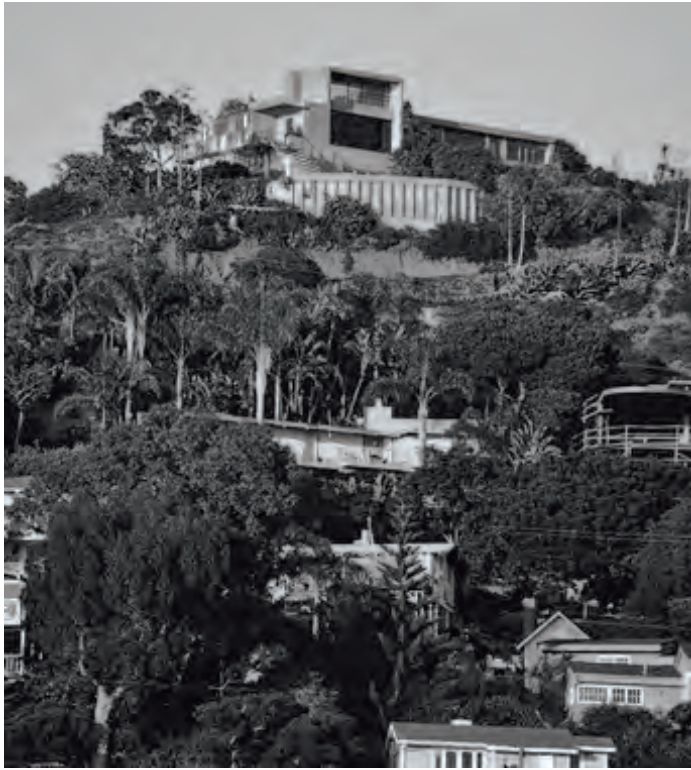
*Laguna Playhouse, Laguna Canyon*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Fire Station, Forest Avenue* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*City Hall, Forest Avenue* (Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Hillside housing, South Laguna* (Ann Christoph) 2016



*One of Charles A. Hunter's depression-era houses*  
(Ann Christoph) 2016

The influence of artists and movie people led to individualized architecture and replicas of styles popular on other continents. In the late 1920s and early 1930s most of the houses and commercial buildings were built in Period Revival styles, often based on pictures of European mansions but at a reduced scale to fit Laguna's smaller lots. Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles were prevalent during the Depression (City of Laguna Beach 1981, 15). Aubrey St. Clair, the son of the painter Norman St. Clair, designed the Mediterranean-style City Hall, the fire house, the Spanish Revival Water District building, the Christian Science Church (now the Hare Krishna temple), several smaller downtown buildings, Tudor-style offices at 1183 and 31709–13 Coast Highway, and distinctive residences elsewhere in the city. Thomas Harper designed a number of Period Revival homes, among them 820 Catalina Street, 487 Shadow Lane, and 629 South Coast Highway, and the 1929 northern addition to Villa Rockledge. Charles A. Hunter, who before the depression had designed hotels and hospitals, was the architect for over 60 houses in Laguna Beach and South Laguna between 1934 and 1941. Many of these were in Cape Cod or beach cottage style, as well as Period Revival styles. Additional architects were Manfred de Ahna, Charles Frye, Fay Spangler, and Gates Burrows. Contractors included Harry B. Harper, Ropp and Mackey, J. Robert Lawrence, Arthur Littlejohns, Stan Smith, H. C. Hind, C. C. Sidwell, and Arthur C. Wilson. William Alexander designed the Halliburton House for the writer and adventurer Richard Halliburton on a hilltop overlooking Aliso Canyon in 1936. Built entirely of concrete, the house was included in a public tour of the region's modern architecture conducted by the University of Southern California School of Modern Architecture in 1938.

Infill development in the post–World War II years created a mix of old and new, but in 1981, when the Historic Resources Element was written, “the scale and character of



the housing styles and overall density of the neighborhoods” was considered to follow the “precedent set by those who came to Laguna Beach in the 1920s . . . a clear preference for human-scale homes constructed in natural materials with a custom design, houses built in harmony with the natural bends of the terrain, and the use of yard space which is both amply and generously landscaped” (City of Laguna Beach 1981, 16). Sixty-eight percent of the city’s housing stock is more than thirty years old (City of Laguna Beach 2008a). The city’s historic register contains some 300 homes built before 1945 whose owners have committed to their preservation, and there is an inventory of more than 500 others judged eligible for the register. Development since the 1970s has been monitored by design review of new construction to maintain the distinctive character of neighborhoods and preserve Laguna’s “village atmosphere,” defined in the Municipal Code (25.05.040[H]) as a combination of appropriately scaled development, diverse and unique architectural designs, pedestrian orientation, and sensitivity to the natural conditions of the site. Architects who worked within these constraints and took design in a more modern direction include John Lautner, Chris Abel, Fred Briggs, Herb Brownell, and Lamont Langworthy. In addition to custom homes, Langworthy designed a system that used individual modules as trusses so that they could be stacked on top of each other. (Fred Lang’s house on Coast Highway was one of these, and there are others still existing in Laguna.)

Laguna’s varied streetscapes include eucalyptus, California sycamore, large palms, California pepper, *Ficus nitida*, *Metrosideros*, *Melaleuca*, *Jacaranda*, pines, Brazilian pepper, Monterey cypress, and queen palm. Some of them contain remnants of plantings initiated early in the development of the particular tract—Italian stone pines and evergreen pears in Mystic Hills, Chinese elms in Rancho Laguna, carrotwoods in Top of the World. Overall, the original

eucalyptus groves and more recent plantings are dominant features of the Laguna Beach landscape.



*Palmer Place*  
(Thomas A Lamb) 2016



*Festival in Laguna*  
(Joane Cromwell) Ca. 1933 - FOAPAC



*Untitled landscape* (William Wendt) 1933 – LAM





*Sycamore Grove* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Coast View* (Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010

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*Laguna Vista Looking North* (George Gardner Symons) 1930 - CLB



*Sycamore Hills*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010





*Laurel Canyon*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010





*Mathis Canyon Sycamore*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010





*Autumn Lake*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



*Egret, Laguna Canyon*  
(Ronald H. Chilcote) 2010



