



Neighborhoods

BAY ISLAND: 100 YEARS OF DUCK HUNTING, FRIENDS AND FANTASIES

By Duncan Forgey

At the turn of the 20th century, four friends from the Los Angeles basin met at the duck blinds in Newport Harbor. They were influential businessmen involved in banking, real estate and law. It was a tradition each fall to hunt and renew friendships. They had rooms in Balboa just a short walk down the road. Their discussions centered on President McKinley, the Boxer Rebellion, Sigmund Freud and the economy. Huddled together in wait for the pintails and mallards, they created new business ventures. They discussed a need for the rail service. "Someday they will build tracks to Balboa," was the prediction.

One hundred years later, four businessmen met at the private tennis court on Bay Island. A successful builder, an architect, a banker and an investor – all powerful figures in Newport Beach's business circles. They had been friends for over 20 years and played tennis religiously, providing an opportunity to discuss President Bush, Bosnia, cloning, and economic issues. They had become fast friends and business partners. Like hunters a century earlier, these men enjoyed this timeless neighborhood that grows older, but never changes. It is a bastion for privacy and as close to paradise as Newport Beach has to offer. Owners make unusual conciliations in order to live and play in these Disney-like environs.

In 1903, Rufus Sanborn purchased – for \$350 – the small hummock surrounded by overflow lands, plus a barn property on the peninsula occupied by the East Newport Garage. Within a year, the

purchase was transferred to the Bay Island Club, a non-profit corporation. Sanborn and Sam Tustin were the first to build homes on the little island connected to the mainland by a long plank trestle. In 1909, the Bay Island Club received government approval to dredge and fill the island. In 1910, the ancestor to the footbridge was built.

The island is approximately five acres. It is divided into 24 bayfront lots plus three and half acres of common area. In addition to the tennis court, the island has numerous gardens, a thick canopy of trees, an off-site parking garage and a view park, which looks out over Newport's largest turning basin. The golf cart is the main mode of transportation on the Island.

Those who own homes there do so by virtue of membership in the holding club. This is accomplished by owing one share in the Bay Island Club. A stock certificate is issued in lieu of the usual grant deed. According to George Sines of First American Title, "It is impossible to insure title because of Bay Island's unique cooperative structure of home ownership. Nothing is recorded; old fashion trust is a big factor out there." This simple fact makes borrowing money from traditional lenders difficult.

Early notables on the Island were Moses Sherman, namesake of the Sherman Library and founder of Sherman Oaks, and, the most famous of the early residents, actress Madame Helene Modejeska and her husband Count Bozanta, who lived in a small cottage at #3 Bay Island in 1907. Due to her fame, the island was known as Modejeska Island in the early part of the 20th century.

The population of the island is as fluid as the tides that brush up against it. During peak summer weekends the population rises to as many as 100. Local accountant Joe Parker remembers the annual picnic and tennis tournament. "Bay Island was a place of mystery and fantasy for the kids," Joe reminisces.

Pricing properties on Bay Island is difficult. It must take into consideration traditional indicators such as location and condition of the home, as well as the fact that the land is not owned by the individual, but by a corporation. Bay Island's privacy and uniqueness compensate for this dilemma. The Island has its own beaches, parks and caretaker. These amenities, along with spectacular views and boat docks, make this some of the choicest real estate in the harbor.

Bay Island opportunities rarely come on the market and command great value when they do. The two most recent sales were for around \$3 million and over \$5 million

So, if you can get an invitation, take advantage of it. As if in a Disney remake of *Song of the South*, you'll find yourself singing a verse of "Zip-a-dee-doo-dah" to the birds and butterflies that abound on this small touch of paradise.



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