



## Neighborhoods

By Duncan Forgey

San Juan is the only romantic spot in California," Richard Henry Dana wrote in his novel, *Two Years Before the Mast*, which immortalized Dana Point in a poetic passage. "Directly before us, rose the perpendicular height of four or five hundred feet...There was a grandeur in everything around, which gave almost a solemnity to the scene...Compared with the plain, dull sand beach of the rest of the coast, this grandeur was as refreshing as a great rock in a weary land."

Despite Dana's feelings that San Juan, the coastal spot which is now Dana Point, was a gem among many pieces of the California coastline, the town named after him took a long time becoming the flourishing spot that it is today.

In early California history, the San Juan Capistrano Mission and huge land grants like Rancho Mission Viejo created a market for grain, wine, olive oil, and tanned hides which were shipped from Dana Point. An idyllic town grew around the mission and the anchorage and by the late 1800's two railroad giants, Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Company, fought for the rights to the area.

At this time, "San Juan by the Sea" was created. It was the first subdivision in the area with lots ranging in price from \$250-\$1,800. An unbelievable \$30,000 worth of lots were sold the first morning. George Fullerton headed up this development which seemed destined to be a smashing success. But due to the lack of an infrastructure, "San Juan by the Sea" died a slow death and never became the intended boomtown.

In 1966 ground was broken for a new harbor that would provide a home to hundreds of vessels. One of California's nicest marinas, Dana Point Harbor, was built, but not without an important casualty: "Killer Dana," one of California's best surfing spots. As a kid, long time surfer and blues musician Frank "Bucky" Moore can remember being chauffeured to "Killer Dana" with buddy Jack Kewitt. "Old Man Kewitt," a real estate salesman, kept lamenting like a disappointed parent that, "Someday this land will be worth a lot of money." Alas, in the early sixties, Dana Point had still not entered the boom times and his beloved properties sat quietly.

Dana Point did finally become a growing town. In the years



The Dana Point bluffs in the 1930s and the future location of Dana Point Harbor

## Road to Riches

prior to cityhood and the adoption of a logical city plan, the lantern streets ended up a mixed bag of single families and income properties. Now, right in the middle of all this is some of the most desirable land yet to be developed on the California coast. Dana Strand is a beautiful stretch of beach and bluff equal to any on the ocean. The war between developers and conservationists has been long and divisive, but according to long time resident John C. Hall, "the City of Dana Point and the developer are very close to reaching an agreement." All parties have promised a development with "taste befitting the location."

Some of the prices in the city have reached the multi-million dollar level. Newer construction in the Ritz Cove and the old and established Monarch Bay are leading the way. The highest priced home sold for a tidy \$6,562,500 in June of '99 in Monarch Bay. Across the board, current prices throughout the city appear from the Mid-\$200,000 range to \$5,900,000.

Today's Dana Point still encompasses some of the prettiest coastal lands in the state. Monarch Bay, Ritz Cove, Beach Road and Niguel Shores are the beach-oriented developments. Inland, the city is peppered with communities developed during the last three decades.

With the town now entering the millennium it is finally finding its boom times, but the beauty and romance written about by Richard Henry Dana remains.