

WRITTEN BY DUNCAN FORGEY

Neighborhoods

By Duncan Forgey

Cinderella sat alone in the great home and dreamed of a life off the farm. Finally, with the help of a fairy godmother and an element of luck, she had the opportunity to meet and marry a handsome prince and, well, you know the rest of the story.

The Newport Harbor area has its own Cinderella story. Locked away for years, the quiet and rural community now called "The Eastside" has erupted on the real estate scene. Originally a farming community teeming with animals and crops, it has become one of our best neighborhoods for young and old alike.

Everything from large commercial ranches to the smaller gentlemen farms dotted the area from the bluffs northeast to Paularino. Fruit trees, crops, cattle, horses and goats were plentiful in the early years. Newport Beach and environs soon became the jewel attracting the rich and famous while the bluffs housed the working class.

At the turn of the last century, Gregory Harper Jr. owned one of the three great farms alongside the Newport to Santa Ana railway. This rail was the heart's blood of the economy connecting McFadden's Landing at the ocean to the commercial center of Santa Ana. At this time there were but three homes in this vast expanse of flat lands, surrounded by numerous crops. Because of his prominence in the area, the local post office became known as "Harper."

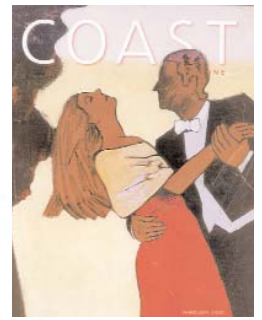
In 1906 the Townsend-Dayman Investment Company bought 1700 acres and immediately subdivided it into 5-acre parcels known as Newport Heights. The area included most of the land from the bluffs to the northeast. Each acre was priced at \$300. A spirited oil boom in Newport and Huntington Beach brought an influx of new residents and more than 200 parcels were sold. This increased population led to commercial needs, such as stores and businesses which grew like coral among the pockets of Harper.

As times changed, the automobile became the harbinger of the future. In the 1920s and 1930s, with the growth of automotive tourism, Harper became a center for gas stations, fruit stands and other tourist-oriented businesses along the corridor of Newport Boulevard.

Slowly the dynamics of the town began to change. Population was on the increase and a group of city fathers believed it was time to consolidate, bringing together Harper, Paularino and areas to the west. They arranged a contest to name the city that would eventually unite all areas of the new city. In 1920 Alice Plumer won the contest with the Spanish "Costa Mesa" denoting a coastal tabletop.

The depression rocked the nation but left Costa Mesa virtually unchanged. The agricultural business continued but tourism slowed substantially. The residents went back to the small businesses and agricultural work that was so natural to them. Even the great earthquake in 1933 that destroyed several buildings and the flood of 1938 did not devastate the "table top" community of Costa Mesa.

The fifties began the monumental growth that would continue



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until present day. The incorporation of the City and a huge housing boom brought with it a wave of development that transformed the city into a great retail center. Newport Beach was growing, as well, from a tourist hamlet to a year-round resort. This allowed Eastside Costa Mesa to benefit from the great residential developments around it. Slowly, as the prices rose in Newport Harbor, housing in Eastside became desirable. Broadway, Flower, Esther and other key streets became like extensions to Newport, sharing schools, shopping, social and business activities. With aggressive business developments on 17th Street, it would evolve into one of the best commercial streets in Orange County, further linking Eastside to Newport Beach.

For four decades, agricultural lots continued to be bought up by developers and farms gave way to homes, condos and housing developments. Today, there are homes in the mid \$200,000 range while a few of the more extraordinary homes are worth around \$1,000,000. Our average home value in today's market is approximately \$300,000 with the better streets pushing home prices well into the \$400,000s and higher. Many outstanding condominium projects, like Back Bay Loop and Brittanywoods provide great living environments.

In the past three years, home values have appreciated faster in Eastside Costa Mesa than in the Baycrest, Westcliff and Harbor Highlands areas of Newport Beach. Many of today's young buyers feel that they can get a greater value in The Eastside than the more expensive areas of Newport Beach. Eastsiders enjoy the proximity to the beach, freeways, shopping and cultural centers at a reduced price.

Just as Cinderella is no longer the outsider looking in, The Eastside has been "invited to the ball" and caught the eyes of many a suitor. So when you see a great white Carriage drawn by four beautiful white steeds, carrying a beautiful princess proceeding down Irvine Boulevard, don't be surprised when it turns towards The Eastside. ■