



# The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

Volume 3 Number 5

September - October 2009

## The History of Leisure World 1963 - 1975

### Chapter 2 - Evolution of a Dreamscape

By Terry Baker

This article is the second in a multi-part series adapted from the transcripts of the Historical Society's first archivist, Marjorie F. Jones. The sections related to governance are also based on "How Leisure World Leadership Evolved," by Robert L. Price, in the *Historical Society Journal*, Spring 1980 and Chapters 1 and 4 of *Fulfilling Retirement Dreams*, published by the Historical Society in 1989.

Robert L. Price spent 13 years in the role of Administrator for Leisure World Laguna Hills prior to his retirement in 1978. As such he represented the Leisure World Foundation and later Professional Community Management, Inc. A graduate of the University of Michigan, his 13 years in civil engineering were followed by 32 years of city and community management and consulting. Price was elected President of the Golden Rain Foundation of Laguna Hills for six consecutive terms. With Marjorie F. Jones he founded the Historical Records Committee, the predecessor of the Historical Society.

#### Early Settlers

The early settlers of Leisure World recall having to drive up El Toro Road quite a piece to the Country Store for groceries and a lot farther if they wanted to go out for dinner. Those modern pioneers also remember that Standard Oil, at the corner of El Toro and Paseo de Valencia, was the only gas stop for miles around.

A young Ed Salter labored over Leisure World acres for his share-cropper father on what once was the famous Moulton Ranch. In those days life was self-sustaining. "...I harnessed spans of mules in order to plow the fields in what is now Leisure World, or take our grain to the El Toro railroad station..." Salter said.

"Back in 1912, we raised wheat and barley on what is now the golf course. We had another 80 acres that now is the Laguna Hills Mall. Many a time I worked that ground with an 8-mule team hitched to a 3-share plow."

The Salter ranch home stood where the Orange County Fire Station is now located. The barns, granary and livestock yards sprawled over what now are the Laguna Hills City Hall and the Laguna Hills Lodge.

Horace and Sarah Salter, after once farming what is now Knott's Berry Farm, moved their family of seven to the Moulton spread in 1912 when they leased 1,600 acres. They raised wheat, barley and black-eyed beans. The rent was one-fourth of their crop output. The Salter's neighbors were also sharecroppers.

"There was plenty of game—deer, quail, anything you wanted," Salter added, "and other animals you didn't necessarily want—skunks, coyotes, wildcats, fox." During the fall and winter the Salter's got their education at a little school house on El Toro Road. "After school we'd hurry home and work until dark, pitching hay and doing chores. We did about six hours of work in two and a half hours before it got dark," Salter recalled.



In 1913 El Toro's one-room school, built in 1891, was replaced by the red brick El Toro School, above. The one-room school was moved to El Toro Road and became St. Anthony's Catholic Church. The red brick school, severely damaged by the Long Beach earthquake of 1933, was abandoned in 1953.

See Evolution on Page 2

## MUSINGS

### Honoree of Month

Our congratulations to **Mary Stone**, our Laguna Woods Honoree for September. We are grateful to the Video Club, whose members videotape the ceremony. Inga Futtrup is the photographer at **Images by Dwayne** who has so expertly captured the images of our honorees for the last seven years.



**Bob Ring**

### Libby Marks

I thank Libby for serving as a valued member of the Society's Board since 2006. Libby was chair of our Special Events Committee. Fortunately, Libby will continue to proof read *The Historian* and much of the other information being entered into OUR electronic archival system, PastPerfect. At the present time Libby has a backlog of more than 400 pages to proof. If you would like to join Libby as one of our proof readers, please call me at the Historical Society—206-0150.

### This Month's Stories

The cover story, written by Society Board Member Terry Baker, was based on the paper written by Marjorie F. Jones. I took the liberty of adding information obtained from 1980-82 Journals of the Leisure World Historical Society and *Fulfilling Retirement Dreams* published by the Society in 1989.

I would like to thank Towers resident Evelyn Swerdlow for providing the information about sculptor David Bialobroda. Many of us knew David—I exercised with him three times weekly in the 6:45am Saddleback Fitness Class.

### Society's Budget

The Board has approved the Society's 2009-10 Budget of \$37,000 which specifies these goals: modernize the Society's archives, including increasing accessibility; continue to participate in the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project; continue to partner with the County's Public Library and other organizations; continue to recognize outstanding residents through the Honoree of the Month Program; publish bi-monthly issues of the Historical Society's newsletter, *The Historian*; and use oral history projects to capture first hand accounts of historical events.

### Correction

I apologize for omitting the *Reform Temple* from the 2009-10 Directory. The Temple meets every Friday at 7:30pm in Clubhouse I Main Lounge.

### Evolution (from Page 1)

### Life Here Millions of Years Ago



**Paleontologists digging for fossils on Avenida Majorca in December, 1964. Building 207 is on the right.**

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County photo

Millions of years before Salter sharecropped on the Moulton ranch and Ross Cortese dreamed of Leisure World, the ocean covered much of Orange County. Before Saddleback Mountain approached its present majestic elevation as the result of earthquakes, the Saddleback Valley area was part of the ancient "Santa Ana Bay."

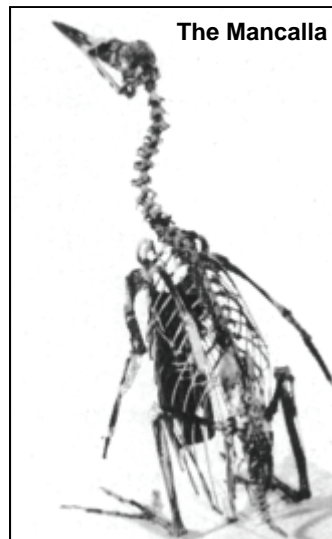
Earlier Leisure World historians reported that before building was completed in Phase 2 of Leisure World, students at the University of Southern California, alerted to the potential of the area, took samplings of the chalky earth from a bank on the north side of Via Puerta at the end of Avenida Sevilla. Based upon laboratory tests, the USC students concluded that the extinct species represented by the specimens from Leisure World lived at the bottom of the sea about 13 or 14 million years ago, probably under conditions similar to those found today offshore from Santa Barbara.

Even more significant evidence of prehistoric life was found when fossil bones were discovered in sandy deposits during excavation and construction on Avenida Majorca. Paleontologists from the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles were notified by Rossmoor. When building operations came to a standstill during the rains of December, 1964, members of the museum staff and a group of volunteers worked feverishly to excavate and remove the fossils. They eventually found bones of marine mammals, birds, fishes, a turtle, and teeth from 20 different species of sharks. It has been said that a portion of a whale skeleton still remains below the kitchen slab of one of the manors in Building 207.

Although parts of Orange County were beginning to emerge from the sea 4 to 9 million years ago, the ocean still covered much of Saddleback Valley. This conclu-

sion was based, in part, on the fossil-bearing beds found on Via Alhambra and Ronda Mendoza in the orange-colored sands. Again, the Natural History Museum excavated bones of whales, dolphins and seals, and shearwaters, boobies and auks. The species, though not identical to those found in the older strata on Avenida Majorca, were of the same general kinds; except that two diving birds, a loon and a grebe, were added.

The flightless, penguin-like auk, Mancalla (manc – imperfect, alla – a kind of auk), was the most abundantly represented bird at the Via Alhambra-Ronda Mendoza site. In fact, Mancalla bones are so abundant in the San Diego area that a composite skeleton was assembled and mounted for display at the Natural History Museum. The cocky little fellow was about 12 inches tall.



The earliest relics of pre-historic people in this immediate area date back 8,000 or 9,000 years to the seed gatherers who lived within walking distance of Aliso Creek. Human remains found in Laguna Beach are believed to be more than 17,000 years old; and even earlier dates for man in southern California have been documented in Los Angeles and San Diego.

### ***FHA Impact***

Leisure World Laguna Hills was built under the provisions of the National Housing Act, Section 213, which clearly defined that a housing project built according to its provisions must provide a plan of ownership and governance by the residents. It was called “cooperative housing” and brought into existence a combination of talent and leadership rarely found in a housing development. This basic principle had to be met in order to secure FHA financing involving 40-year mortgages at 5¼% and allowing only a 3% down payment.

In order to receive FHA compliance, it was necessary to do much more than merely apply for permission or support. FHA’s experience had been with small housing projects and suddenly they were confronted with one initially projected for more than 20,000 residents. Cortese and his group fought a vigorous battle and won the support of FHA—to the benefit of all concerned.

Among those early leaders were men of vision and experience. First was A. Oakley Hunter, whose previous experience as both Congressman and FHA Commissioner had given him the knowledge and expertise to walk the hallways of Washington and to talk with the right people. Much of the success attained was due to the ingenuity and persuasive approach of this leader. Later he became head of the Federal National Mortgage Association.

The other was L.M. Letson, a hospital administrator, who brought to the planning an understanding of management with all of its implications for the people and their participation in the process. In addition, his insight into the complex nature of comprehensive medical care and services led to the early incorporation of health care plans for Leisure World. As the first administrator at Seal Beach, he learned what to do and what not to do at Laguna Hills. Thus, early mistakes and many difficult problems were avoided during the complex process of creating a Leisure World retirement community of unprecedented size.

### ***Management Emerges***

A key aspect which had to be incorporated in planning Leisure World governance was the requirement of FHA that the developer Rossmoor Corporation was to have no voice in the management of the community and its several emerging corporations. Section 213 stressed the concept of people getting together, forming their own corporate structures and then employing a developer and builder to construct the physical plant.

However, in the case of all Leisure Worlds, this approach was hardly feasible. There were no people to start their own non profit corporations, hence they were created on paper and permitted to be born after the fact. This was done by Rossmoor out of sheer necessity, but adhering to strict rules from FHA to keep hands off once these corporations were created.

Here again the political and legal background of Oakley Hunter served all the parties concerned. His law firm was the catalyst, carefully drafting all of the documents, and with particular attention to the preservation of the autonomy of the groups of people who would later own the community.

From this emerged several community corporations (mutuals) with “figurehead” directors and cross agreements which created the necessary legal relationships required by law.

During this same formative period a management company, the Leisure World Foundation (LWF), was

created with a number of prominent leaders on its board of directors. Shortly after its formation, William Simon took over the position with title of President from Lewis M. Letson. Simon was a retired FBI administrator.

Most of the initial funding for LWF was borrowed from Rossmoor. LWF sponsored the early mutual corporations and also the Golden Rain Foundation of Laguna Hills (GRF). LWF set up the sales program with the creation of another company named New Horizons. In addition, LWF managed GRF and each Mutual as it was formed, until there were enough residents to operate each entity.

Each mutual corporation became a sizeable land owner, with its many members residing in their respective manors. Each mutual corporation had to borrow its own construction money and make its own sales. The mutuals were corporate members of GRF from inception and every mutual buyer became both a member in his own mutual corporation and a resident member of GRF.

The contract with New Horizons was terminated in 1965, and the sales force was managed for the mutuals by LWF. Responsibility for sales remained with LWF through the development period of the first 21 housing mutuals.

### **Golden Rain Foundation's Role**

Experience at Leisure World Seal Beach had taught governance planners not to place the Golden Rain Board at the very center of governance and management. *At Laguna Hills GRF had a less powerful role as custodian and overseer of only community wide responsibilities other than those in the housing area.*



**This tranquil sheep meadow, shown in 1964, was rapidly giving way to a busy community having an eventual population of 30,000. In background is a portion of Clubhouse I.**

Actually, the relationship was spelled out in what was called the *“Trust Agreement,”* wherein—with FHA approval—all the mutuals joined in deciding that GRF would hold certain community type properties in trust for the mutuals and thus make them equally available for all residents. As they are today, GRF Directors were chosen by the directors of the several mutual corporations, thus placing certain priority of control in the mutuals. Nonetheless, for many years GRF continued to be looked upon as the umbrella corporation, legally erroneous as it may be. GRF is the only one of the four corporations of Leisure World Laguna Hills in which every homeowner holds a non-voting resident membership.

It was also apparent that misunderstanding and possible future conflicts could be avoided by separating the image of the LWF from that of Rossmoor Corporation. At Seal Beach this was not understood and led to two years of conflict with the final result being the termination of the contract with LWF.

Not so at Laguna Hills. Backed by *the agreement with FHA which stipulated that the managing agent could not be fired without Agency approval*, plus wise leadership and good public relations, a sound cooperative program was maintained for many years.

### **How Leisure World Leadership Evolved**

This trend was strengthened by the selection of competent and wise leaders in the management field. Edward Olsen became President of the Leisure World Foundation and Robert Price became the Administrator. He was brought down from Leisure World Walnut Creek where he had been Director of Physical Properties. These appointments occurred in the fall of 1964 with Price assuming office November 23, 1964. For many years before that Price had been active in the field of city management and community activities, even as far away as Afghanistan where he taught and supervised the training of city managers.

Olsen came from the office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Los Angeles where he had been both in the legal and operational phases of the organization. He became the head of LWF and later of Professional Community Management, Inc. His leadership and involvement was to be most significant for nearly 20 years. Both Price and Olsen were key figures in the evolving plan of administering the affairs of Leisure World and in working closely with the Rossmoor Corporation in the building and development of the complete project.



El Toro Road, circa 1963.

### **First Sales**

Before Rossmoor actually started selling manors in February 1964, it had about \$15 million invested in a risky venture Leisure World was in the boondocks, and Rossmoor did not know whether buyers would accept coming to a place where there were no restaurants, no shopping and very little of anything else. Cortese knew that to create an impact and generate interest for people to buy, he had to put in a multi-million dollar clubhouse, a full-size 18-hole golf course, beautiful thoroughfares and an attractive model display area and sales pavilion.

A major expenditure was the improvement of El Toro Road. At that time it was just a two-lane country road. Rossmoor improved it, using county standards, so that it would eventually accommodate six lanes. Initially it was striped for four lanes. To obtain permission to develop Leisure World, Rossmoor had to construct a sewer treatment plant and a water system all at considerable expense. These "front end" costs amounted to about \$15 million.

The first mutual contained 370 units located on Calle Aragon opposite Clubhouse I. They were sold in 1½-hours after they were put on the market in February 1964. That Mutual was a tremendous success. Prices at that time ranged between \$12,000 and \$24,000.

FHA financing had certain conditions that few developers would accept because of the risk. For example, in order to get this form of financing, Rossmoor had to be separate and distinct from the marketing management effort. The marketing of the product, managing the sales force, and placing the advertising of the community were technically controlled by LWF.

Another condition imposed by FHA that added to the risk, was the requirement that Rossmoor convey com-

munity facilities such as clubhouses and golf courses to GRF far in advance of getting paid for these facilities. There were no assurances from anyone that Rossmoor would ever get paid for these facilities. If sales ceased for any reason there would be no way for Rossmoor to recoup its multi-million dollar investment.

### **Original Plan Was For Seven Clubhouses**

The original master plan called for seven clubhouses, the globe area, an administration building and a maintenance building, all to be turned over to the community as finances allowed. The globe area, at its original location (the current Circuit City building) was owned by GRF for two months in 1965. Its conveyance was reversed by an FHA mandate and in its place came title to Clubhouse II.

The immediate responsibility of LWF's management was to organize each mutual with its own resident directors. Full responsibility for this fell on the shoulders of Administrator Robert Price. Other members of the management team assisted in finding six members for a nominating committee.

Each Mutual was financially self-supporting from its beginning, as far as its own internal costs were concerned. However, GRF costs—clubhouses, security and the like—were heavily subsidized by sales-related income. This was planned and necessary, so as to offset the unavoidable initial operational deficit of those early months and years.

It is a tribute to the financial genius utilized by those who planned the community to have made it possible to accomplish the satisfactory service levels that were provided to the first residents as they moved in during the latter months of 1964. Each manor was subsidized by an amount of over \$300 per month. In 1965 this dropped to about \$50.

The fact that all mutual corporations started with financial strength and have remained that way greatly added to the stable relationship that has prevailed between management and the many governing boards. Virtually all the services provided to residents in 1989 were provided to the early move-ins. However, closed circuit TV (Channel 6) was temporarily delayed until 1966 because of the cost to serve a limited population that first year. The riding stable, lawn bowling greens and the garden centers were not completed in 1965.

**[The next installment will focus on the first move-ins and the "Trust Agreement" between the mutuals and GRF.]**

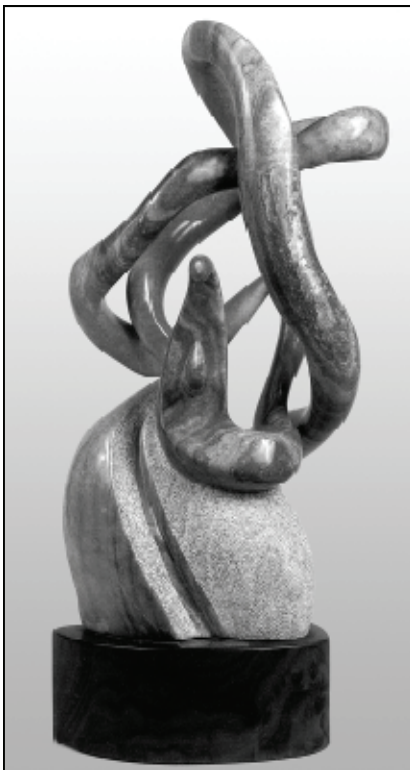
## David Bialobroda – Sculptor

In spite of the hardships life dealt him, David Bialobroda was an optimist. “Everything pans out,” was his truism. Until he left Laguna Woods in 2006, David preached this through his words and a large number of sculptures.

Within his Leisure World home was a world of prize-winning art, from paintings given to him by a friend to rock and bronze statues he created since his retirement in 1976. That’s when he ditched his days as a tailor and realized his 51-year dream to sculpt—a dream that he held steady ever since he watched a tombstone-maker chisel angels in 1925.

For 25 years, the self-taught Polish immigrant transformed, among other rocks, Utah alabaster and Belgian marble boulders into his visions. He cautioned others that this practice isn’t for everyone. “If you don’t have patience, don’t touch it,” David said. He continued, “This is a way of life, not a profession. It expresses my hopes, my desires, my wants, my dreams and my love. It is impossible to express in words how extraordinary this creative process of art is.”

To understand Bialobroda, one must look to his works. In “Embrace,” he recalls two pre-war friends—a husband and wife—just liberated from a German concentration camp after World War II. They chanced upon him, saying, “Look, David’s alive.” The group hugged, revealing to him their skeletal bodies, evidence of the war’s mistreatment.

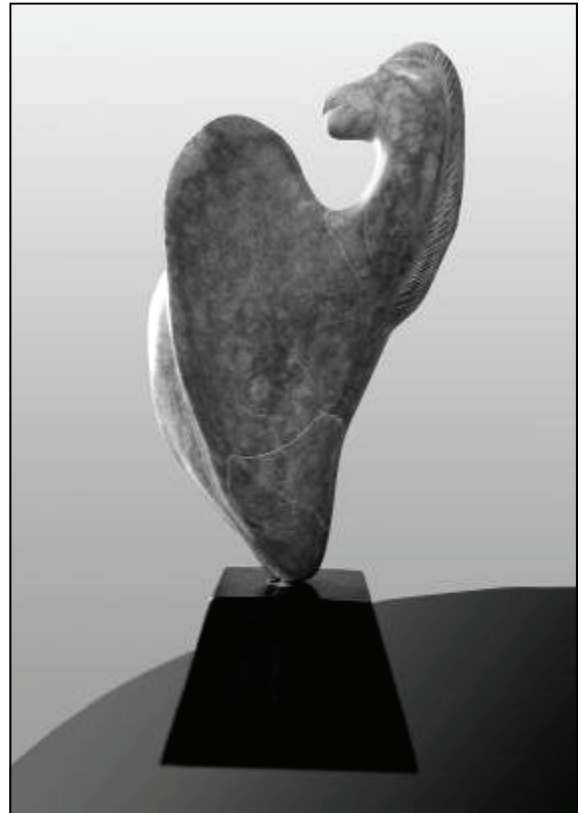


**EMBRACE, Alabaster 34" x 13" x 10"**

For 20 years, David’s works were shown in New York, San Diego, Los Angeles, La Jolla and San Bernardino. His modest home was dwarfed by his massive sculptures, a total exceeding 50 pieces, depicting his two major themes, the Holocaust and love. Other works tapped into time-honored issues such as the environment, peace and their relationships with one another. And it all started with a rock and a vision.

### **Childhood Dreams**

For Bialobroda, sculpting was the fulfillment of childhood dreams. In Poland, his family lived near a tombstone-maker who carved beautiful angels



**HORSE, Marble 15" x 9" x 6", was given to Evelyn Swerdlow, David’s dearest friend. Evelyn contributed information for this article.**

out of stone. “Every day I would go and watch him,” David recalled. “I was amazed. One day I said, ‘How do you make a nose?’ He said, ‘This is a very clever question.’ And he showed me.”

David was apprenticed as a cobbler at age 8. When David was 12 years old, his father took him to his cousin to be trained as a tailor. During his apprenticeship, a couple invited him into their home to listen to music. Not only did he listen with careful ears, but he also lent his voice. When the couple heard it, they sent him to study music, and his ability progressed until after the war. He said that because the Germans sprayed him with DDT, it caused the eventual loss of his precious musical voice.

David did not put a chisel and a hammer to stone, nor pick up clay, until age 58, when he retired and moved to Leisure World, and his wife suggested that he take one of the sculpting

classes available at Clubhouse IV, and it was free of charge. “I would never have paid for it,” David said. “I did not think I was talented.”

Some mysterious alchemy took place the moment he took the clay into his hands. The tailor was transformed into a sculptor and “everything came back to him that he learned from the tombstone-maker.”

### ***The Survivor***

In March 1977, Rose Kabat crafted a lyrical poem about her friend David titled, “*The Survivor*”

*“In the bottom of life I found diamonds.”*

*We sit facing each other.  
He sips tea from a tall glass,  
reminder of Polish times.  
His eyes hold mine, and*

*over the clink of teaspoon  
against glass, recounts  
in heavily accented syllables  
the joy of his youth:*

*Apprenticed to a cobbler in the old country,  
he breathed the strong scent of rubber cement  
and the animal smell of soft leather.  
Later, learned the tailors craft,*

*his needle’s stitches so tiny, they eluded  
the naked eye. Became a master tailor  
in the camps, escaped death, sewing  
invisible seams for the chiefs of the “Master Race.”*

*Awakened before dawn, he and his  
stripe-clad comrades, skeleton-thin,  
stood for hours, cold, shivering,  
as the sun reluctantly spread its glow*

*over a brooding sky. He tells of  
the welcome sunrise, its embrace  
filling with warmth his artist’s eye and soul,  
lending a modicum of hope for a future.*

*“For me, the grass was green somewhere  
and I knew birds still sang.  
I saw the sun rise and set, and  
the moon throw down its searchlight beam.*

*I see things optimistically, he says,  
nodding over the tea glass.  
I find that beauty sustains me.  
Others without hope, gave way and died.”*

*Today he sculpts victims of the Holocaust  
in alabaster and marble.*

*His parting words as he stands to leave:  
“For me, I collect pearls, not pins.”*

Until David Bialobroda’s health caused him to relocate to an assisted-care facility in Israel in 2006, he believed that his voice resonated through his new music—sculpture. All has worked out because, the self-described storyteller says, “Life is life. Life is there to live it.” For many, life in Laguna Woods is the beginning of a new life.

[This article is based, in part, on “Forget Golf, There Are Masterpieces to Make,” by Sara Rimer, *New York Times*, March 21, 1999 and “This Is a Way of Life, Not a Profession,” by James Meier, *Our Times*, 2000. Three of David’s sculptures are on display at the Historical Society.]



**NEVER AGAIN, Bronze, 34" x 16½" x 8", depicts David's sister, brother-in-law and their child who died in a bomb shelter in World War II.**

Yes! I / we want to support the Historical Society of Laguna Woods in 2013. The Historical Society participates in the following worthwhile activities:

- Library of Congress' Veterans History Project
- Oral history projects that capture stories from Veterans and participants in the El Toro Airport battle
- Production of a commemorative book celebrating the Village's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- Maintenance of a vast repository of historical material
- Bi-Monthly publication of *The Historian*
- Honoree of the Month Ceremonies

The Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt charitable corporation – #FJ95-3213797. Your support will make it possible to continue these activities, as well as many other special projects, events, and activities.

**Membership Category**

Name 1 \_\_\_\_\_ \$300.00 – Patron  
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\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 50.00 – Friend

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***Please mail to Historical Society, P.O. Box 2220, Laguna Woods, CA 92654-2220  
or drop off at our office (next to Laguna Woods Village Library).  
If you have questions please call 206-0150. Thank you.***



This tranquil sheep meadow shown in a 1964 photo was rapidly giving way to a busy community. In background is a portion of one of the many clubhouses destined to dot the landscape on the rolling Laguna Hills.

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