

Huntington Beach Historical Society

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Holly Sugar Company

Soon after the year 1900 the raising of celery had shrunk from 6000 acres to 3000 and the farmers were looking for additional crops to grow in the Huntington Beach area and especially on the marginal land that contained some alkali. It was found that sugar beets were a good crop and very well suited for the land. A sugar mill had been built at Los Alamitos in 1895 and railroad facilities with 3 beet dumps were provided on the Huntington Beach-Smeltzer line. Two plants were built later in Santa Ana and one in Anaheim to handle the increased crop.

By the year 1906 sugar beets was a very substantial crop in the Huntington Beach, Westminster, Fountain valley areas. Farmers were shipping 400 to 500 tons per day at an average \$5.50 per ton or over \$200,000.00 per crop. The beets were hauled to the siding ^{where} the beet loading dumps were located and many teams of horses hooked to the wagon to pull it up the incline to the top where it was tilted and the beets loaded into open railroad gondola cars. Full trains daily made the trip to the refineries. The beets had a sugar content of from 23 to 25% and the beets weighed up to 40 pounds each.

During 1908 the farmers in the eastern valley persuaded the Pacific Electric Co. to construct a railroad from Huntington Beach to Santa Ana and build four beet dumps. This was completed in 1909.

In 1909 the Holly Sugar Company, a Colorado Company had decided to locate a refinery in Huntington Beach and entered into negotiation with the Huntington Beach Company, Subdividers of the Garfield Annex industrial subdivision, for a large plot of land located at Garfield and Gothard streets. Negotiations were completed and in 1911 the plant was constructed. Many qualified workers were brought out from Holly and Swink Colorado to construct and operate the plant. Mr Anthony Tovatt was the Engineer in charge of building the plant and a Mr. Johnson was the General Manager in charge of operating it. The plant consisted of a fine brick office building, sugar refining mill, large sugar storage warehouse and a beautiful two story home for the manager. The area was well landscaped and a show place.

The year's crop was refined after harvest time in the fall of the year, causing the mill to run from 3 to 4 months then placing the sugar in storage for year round delivery. From its existence in 1911 to 1922 it was a major source of employment for many persons living in the area as these were lean years for the area and after each summer season tourist business dropped off and harvest season arrived there was little employment except agriculture.

During the years 1917-1918 the operation of the refinery was vital due to the need for sugar during the war years and the shortage that existed and the sugar was immediately put into use.

The end of 1920 brought an oil boom to the area and the sugar mill was close to the center of oil operations. Five railroad sidings were constructed immediately south of the sugar refinery and trains were being loaded with oil 24 hours per day and oil field lumber and machinery unloaded constantly with great congestion for the area.

By 1924 it was found advisable to discontinue refining of sugar and use the property for oil field purposes. In 1925 Mr Anthony Tovatt, who had supervised construction of the plant was again brought out from Colorado to disassemble the plant and take it to Torrington Wyoming where it stands today.

The Holly Sugar Company had formed an oil company under the name Holly Oil

Company to produce oil from this and other holdings in the area and now decided to enter the oil refining business so the Social Refining Company came into existence and the plant was turned into an oil refinery which operated for many years, finally being torn down and the land levelled to its original state. The large warehouse which was of heavy steel construction with large brick walls and reinforced concrete roof was constantly used as a sugar warehouse by Holly Sugar Company, first for locally refined sugar, and during later years for sugar refined in their Santa Ana Plant. The concrete used in building the roof and floor of the building came from sand and gravel scooped out of the ocean at low tide about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile east of the pier. It was piled on the beach and left all winter for the winter rains to wash out the salt then sold the following year. For this purpose mules and scrapers were used and the wagons used for hauling had 2 X 4's loose in the bottom of the wagon which could be turned on edge to dump the load.

The fine home is gone, The sugar mill razed and last week workmen with a crane and breaking ball knocked down the warehouse and hurriedly reclaimed the used brick for other uses. The area will be restored to its natural state with only the Office building left to show of a cycle and era in the history of Huntington Beach. The property was repurchased by the Huntington Beach Company who will master plan it for a different, fine, useful purpose.

Many of the oldtimers hate to see it go but so went the Celery, Lima Beans, Sugar Beets, Peppers and other crops that went to make way for new houses.

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