

## B. History

Efforts to develop the area now known as the City of Long Beach began in the 1880s. In 1880, the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) extended service to the area, and an attempt was made to develop the area as a summer resort, relying on the new rail line to provide transportation for visitors. The “Long Beach Improvement Company” secured a 100 year lease to the island of Long Beach and built the Long Beach Hotel. The hotel was 900 feet long and 500 feet wide, and claimed it was the largest hotel in the world at that time. The hotel was located on the north side of West Broadway and spanned Riverside Boulevard. East of the hotel was a row of cottages; bathing and picnic pavilions were located to the west. A non-denominational chapel was located southeast of the hotel.

In the early 1900s, William Reynolds, determined that Long Beach was a place in which he would design a planned community. Reynolds purchased Long Beach in 1907, including the then failing Long Beach hotel.<sup>1</sup> During that same year, the hotel and the chapel were destroyed by fire.<sup>2</sup>

When Reynolds arrived, the area was comprised of swamp with groins. A solid island land mass was formed after Reynolds dredged his namesake channel and used the dredged material to fill in the groins. The Reynolds plan also required soil to be brought in for construction of each house, further stabilizing the land. Reynolds built the boardwalk, developed the medians and street malls that remain today, and started the first sewer systems. In 1922, the City of Long Beach was incorporated. It has the distinction of being one of the last planned communities of Nassau County in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

Development of the City generally occurred in four phases: the Reynolds planned resort community phase (1908 – 1919); the post World War One Phase (1919-1929); and the post depression phase (1930-1945), during which the City started to become a year round community; and the post World War Two Phase.

The Reynolds Estate homes, built as part of the planned resort community phase, are generally large villa-style formal homes with red tile roofs and stucco facades built to meet covenants established by Reynolds. These homes are concentrated along Penn Avenue, which maintains its original red brick paving, and adjacent avenues. These homes were constructed to meet the summer vacation needs of a wealthy clientele.

During the second phase following World War I, houses, generally of the Moorish Revival architectural style were built throughout the central and eastern neighborhoods of the City. Also during this phase, the Walks and the West End neighborhoods were created. The majority of the homes built in these neighborhoods are bungalows. However, Spanish Stucco and Tudor style houses built during this period are also found in the West End.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information from Study of Superblock site by Jo-Ann McLean, Inc., Archeological Consultant, 2001, and telephone interviews with Karen Adamo, Past President, Long Beach Historical Society and Roberta Fiore, Long Beach Historian, May 12, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Study of Superblock site by Jo-Ann McLean, Inc., Archeological Consultant, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Telephone interviews with Karen Adamo, Past President, Long Beach Historical Society and Roberta Fiore, Long Beach Historian, May 12, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The Estates Club, The Long Beach Historical and Preservation Society, [www.longbeachhistoricalsociety.org/Estates%20Club.htm](http://www.longbeachhistoricalsociety.org/Estates%20Club.htm), accessed March 22, 2007.

During this phase, the New American Hotel was constructed in the West End as a summer weekend resort.

In the third, post depression, phase, the City of Long Beach became a year round community. Summer houses and bungalows, as well as the larger circa 1909 houses, were converted to year round use and the year round population increased.<sup>5</sup> Family oriented hotels including the Ocean Crest, Winkler, Murida and Atlantic were constructed to accommodate family-oriented visitors. By the 1940s, Long Beach could accommodate more than 70,000 summer residents. The Boardwalk hotels including the President, Ocean Crest, Jackson and Nassau Hotel saw their hay day.<sup>6</sup>

Following World War II, Long Beach declined as a vacation destination. Air-conditioning allowed people to remain in nearby cities throughout the summer months and more accessible air travel allowed vacationers to travel longer distances.<sup>7</sup> Long Beach lost its cache as a resort community by the 1960s and long-time summer family renters died. This left large hotel buildings along the boardwalk, Long Beach Boulevard and National Boulevard that had flourished from the 1910s to the 1940s, economically obsolete

Due to the decommissioning of the New York State psychiatric hospitals during the 1970s, and the need for community residences for former hospital clients, many hotels were converted to long-term stay facilities to house this population. This use of the old hotels, the general tightening of the financial markets, and increasing interest rates precipitated a decline in the City. A change in social policy emphasizing smaller, scattered site community based housing for this population precipitated decommissioning of these hotels for this use and made their redevelopment economically viable. Redevelopment of the hotel sites for upscale multi-family residences helped to usher in a renaissance for the City that continues today.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Fiore, Roberta April 11, 2007, e-mail.

<sup>7</sup> Fiore, Roberta, "Strollin' Along"