

BEEKS PLACE

Personal recollections of Allan Beek. Dates from recollection only.

Section 17 was originally one of the alternate square miles given by the government to railroad companies which built a line within fifty miles. J. A. Beek purchased this section from the Southern Pacific Land Co. about 1927. He placed it in his wife's name, Carroll B. Beek, and she left it to their three sons, the present (1996) owners.

The property is not a full square mile. About one tenth of the section, on the northwest corner, had been granted to a placer mine operator before this section was given to the railroad. The former owner of this "placer mine" property, Mr. Eugene Johnson, stated that he had been all over the property and had found no trace of any mining work at all. It was his opinion that the deputy who swore he had inspected the site and gave a detailed description of the mining operations he had found there, must have been a family member, a close friend, or been bribed.

The story of Beeks Place is the story of Mr. Joseph Allan (Joe) Beek. Joe was born in Orrington, Maine, on December 16, 1880. The family came to New Mexico where his father died of tuberculosis in 1893. Joe worked to support the family and had a very poor, but optimistic, young manhood. He spent considerable time living on the Colorado plains, and working for the Reclamation Service in Arizona and New Mexico, including time spent as operator of a rural electric power plant. These experiences left him with a permanent devotion to land reclamation (for forestry if not for agriculture or housing) and to introduction of electrical power.

With help from his uncles and aunts he eventually came to Pasadena and enrolled about 1910 in Throop Polytechnic Institute (later Caltech), majoring in electrical engineering, of course. In Pasadena Joe, now in his thirties, became acquainted with a number of influential people, who evidently were favorably impressed. After three years he left Throop for a position with the Legislature in Sacramento. He soon became Secretary of the California State Senate, and held that office for more than fifty years, until his death in 1968. The fact that the Senators regularly re-elected him to this post, despite the winds of change that blew through Sacramento during those fifty years, is a testimonial to his ability, honesty, and diplomacy.

During his Throop days, Joe worked summers selling lots on Balboa Island, Newport Beach. When he married in 1920, he and Carroll established their home on Balboa Island. He developed several subdivisions in Newport Beach (and elsewhere), founded the Balboa Island Ferry, managed the annual Tournament of Lights for many years, and founded a childrens' "yacht club". During World War II he became a Commodore and took a convoy of small supply ships to the South Pacific.

During this busy career, Joe kept Beeks Place as a hobby and retreat. The first and main cabin was built around 1929. It was later surrounded with rock and cement walls built up against the existing wooden walls. It had a flush toilet served by a septic tank 120 feet or so down the canyon to the west; just beyond the swimming pool.

The swimming pool was built about 1939 or 1940. For a swimming pool, it was quite small and not satisfactory. A Sequoia Gigantea had been planted near where the pool was built. The pool construction was amateur and it soon developed leaks into the root system of the Sequoia, which responded with enthusiasm, branches spread over the pool. To preserve the pool, Joe cut down the Sequoia; this seems to be a case of reversed priorities.

Originally, Joe had intended to be a subdivider in the mountains; he sold a number of lots in Tin Mine Canyon for \$10 each. When he found he could not supply water to his subdivision he offered to buy the lots back. Only some of the buyers accepted this offer; some had recorded their deeds and kept their lots. From time to time heirs or speculators locate another of the deeds and record it, so pieces have disappeared from the property over the years.

One piece was sold to the U. S. Government for a fire look-out station. This was on the main ridge about midway between the site and Oak Flat. The Forest Service built a cabin and had a family living there for several years in the 1930's. (The cabin has since been removed.)

The Black Star Canyon and Skyline Drive roads were both well maintained from the 1920's through the 1960's but were closed with locked gates in the fire season. The area was little visited by the public in the 1930's; some family excursions in the 1930's were conducted in the nude. As the installation was only a hobby, everything was done on a low budget, using surplus or discarded materials and employing family and friends (who enjoyed the outing) as free labor in the work crews for building projects. When the Balboa Island water tank was abandoned by the city of Newport Beach, Joe obtained it, disassembled it, took it to the mountain, and reassembled it on the ridge about 200 feet from the cabin. Its foundations are still there. It held 20,000 gallons, and was the main water supply for the installation. It had to be kept full or the staves would dry out and shrink, making it leak. This was its undoing. Power to pump water was lacking for a long time in the 1970's. The tank dried out and blew over in a Santa Ana Wind. The lumber disappeared within a few months; presumably stolen. (All redwood and two inches thick, it was nice lumber.)

A twin of this tank was used by Sunset Beach. When it was retired, it was converted to an apartment, still on top of its tower, and is now a prominent landmark in Sunset Beach.

Another cabin and various sheds were built from time to time. Numerous walls capped with cemented rock were built to try to stop erosion of the hillsides. Great numbers of pine trees were planted and watered until they became established. (Many of these were later destroyed in one season about 1960 by an invasion of beetles.) Supplies were brought up by truck. Hired hands were employed on many of the projects, and even to live on the place. (This was the reason for the second cabin.) Sometimes small families lived on the site and took care of it.

A spring in the canyon leading northeast from the site (a branch of Tin Mine Canyon) supplied a limited but reliable source of water. A dam, water box, and large cement cistern were built in the canyon bottom and are still there. The first pump was powered by a one-cylinder gasoline engine. In the late 1940's this was replaced by a pump powered by an electric motor driven by 32-volt energy from the top. The wiring for the power line come from a variety of free sources. Some came from a telephone or telegraph line that the Forest Service maintained along the ridge, but then abandoned. Some came from the old electrical system torn out of the state Capitol Building when it was remodeled.

Lighting in the cabins was originally supplied by Coleman lanterns, but it was always Joe's ambition to replace this with real electric light. The first electrical system was modest: A 6-volt wind-generator mounted on the roof of the "garage" (the outbuilding closest to the steel structure, with a cement floor). This charged a bank of five storage batteries, in parallel. When they were charged, a set of switches was thrown and the generator switched over to charging a second set of five batteries in parallel, while the original set, now connected in series, supplied 32-volt power to the cabins.

It soon turned out that the wind generator on the roof did not supply enough energy. A larger, 32-volt, generator was placed atop a three-legged tower, well out on the ridge where there was unobstructed wind. The base of this tower is the triangular cement slab marked 9/26/41. All three sons were present for the casting of this foundation, and their initials decorate the three corners of the slab.

After W.W.II, Joe began to revisit the Colorado plains, where the Rural Electrification Administration had now brought in power, rendering obsolete the many Jacobs 32-volt wind-electric systems that farmers had installed. They were now available for the cost of dismantling and shipping. Joe bought about a dozen and took them to the Santa Ana Mountains, where the large steel structure was built about 1949 or 1950 to accommodate them. He also found that he could purchase Edison batteries that the railroads were retiring from service in their signal towers. The "garage" was filled with two banks of Edison batteries, and four gasoline generators to cover the times when the wind didn't blow or all the wind generators were "down". There was also a diesel generator in the shed that was built

around the base of the big steel structure. The original three-legged wooden tower was taken down in the early 1950's and replaced by a higher, steel, tower.

The wind-electrics were a constant maintenance problem, as many of the developers of commercial wind-generator "farms" found in the 1980's. Rare but violent gusts would destroy the blades. Joe's grandson, Charles Beek, spent some heartbreaking years in the 1960's attempting to keep the generators in repair. He manufactured his own plastic blades, and might have succeeded, but by 1970 the site had become overwhelmed by an insuperable environmental hazard: Vandalism.

With the advent of four-wheel drives and off-road vehicles, every piece of open space became a target for swashbucklers who, not finding lions or elephants to shoot, would show their daring by shooting the heart out of diesel generators, door locks, water tanks, and wind-electrics. Everything that could be taken, even if it required considerable cutting, was taken. The buildings were smashed. The property was used for several years in the late 1970's and early 1980's for mock battles by weekend warriors shooting dye bullets. It seemed an appropriate use for a site as devastated as by a retreating army.

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