



**STATION IN MEMORY ONLY** -Robert Chavelle engages in childhood pastime of walking rails in front of the Palms Station which no longer

serves as a train depot but as a part-time Boy Scout house. The railroad station once served as the hub of a busy agricultural community. Times photo

## FROM FARMS TO APARTMENTS

# Palms Losing Identity, Calm Life

**PALMS**—A train sped over the green hills where cattle grazed peacefully and finally chugged to a stop at the Palms Depot, then the only station between Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

That was 80 years ago.

Today the yellow frame depot is no longer the hub of a rural community. It stands nearly forgotten between a busy freeway and a factory.

It is a symbol of another day and reflective of what has happened to Palms.

### Market for Farm Products

From the ranches that circled the village of Palms 80 years ago plodding wagons brought in the products of agriculturally rich La Balle-na Valley.

That was before the village grew and became a part of urban West Los Angeles. Lost is the calm rural life. Nearly lost too is the identity of this community that was formally established on 560 acres in 1836.

A handful of residents, most of them old timers, are fighting to preserve the identity of the community

—but the battle appears discouraging.

Joseph Hillis, a liquor store operator in his second term as president of the Palms Chamber of Commerce, admits the chamber has not done a good job in promoting Palms.

"We need publicity," he said. "If you make enough noise you get recognition.

"We should have a pipeline to City Hall. We're not unhappy with Councilman Edmund Edelman. We just don't have the facilities to let him know what we want," Hillis said.

He said the chamber does not have the funds to hire a secretary nor rent an office.

### Few Know Area History

Hillis and other community leaders also admit that few of the estimated 52,580 Palms residents care about the community's existence and history and many of them don't even know they live in Palms.

Hillis explains part of the reason for this rests in the fact that Palms is swiftly changing from an area of

single family homes to an apartment district.

The Palm - lined streets, from which the community apparently got its name, have been sliced away.

It is ironic that Palms, once the middle of a huge green belt, is working to get a park of its own.

### Separated by Freeway

Hillis, who said he realized that criticism of the chamber reflects on him, pointed out that Palms Park is separated from the community by the Santa Monica Freeway and children have a hard time getting there.

There are plans for a park on the site of a no longer used library building at Woodbine St. and Vinton Ave. When it will be constructed is uncertain.

"We feel we should have a park," Hillis said. "It doesn't have to be too big. But enough for some grass for the kids."

A bright spot for the community is the Palms post office, Hillis feels because its cancellation on letters

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# PALMS CHANGES

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provides some Palms advertising.

In 1886 the county surveyor laid out the first 560 acres of Palms, north of present Venice Blvd. between Overland and Manning Aves.

The first residents moved into the area the next year and the community soon became a trading center.

A post office was established in 1874, a school district in 1888 and the Chamber of Commerce in 1907.

Palms now is generally north of Venice Blvd. bordering the Santa Monica and San Diego Freeways. There may be some arguments about those boundaries from some, depending on their chauvinism.

In 1890 a United Brethren Church was built on Tabor St. by Milton Wright, a church official and father of Orville and Wilbur Wright, according to one local historian. The church is still in use, though it was recently re-

furbished and looks like a new building.

By 1912 about 300 persons lived in Palms. In that year the residents made a decision that was a critical blow and may have been regrettable to some in retrospect.

An unfriendly neighbor to the south, Culver City, was flexing its young muscles and Palms feared it would be annexed.

This, plus the community's need for water, pushed it into joining the city of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles made many improvements that attracted many new residents, about 3,500 of them by the early 1930s.

Between 1940 and 1960 the population rose sharply.

Traces of the old Palms were increasingly hard to find, if anyone cared to look.

New residents swung to cliff dwelling in apartments rather than the homey bungalows. And the trend shows no sign of slowing.

The old, dusty railroad depot is used only part-time by Boy Scouts now and is hidden from view by other facilities.

It has been a long time since the last train stopped there.