

Historian Carries On Battle to Preserve Palms Identity

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DAVID I. WORSFOLD

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Times photo

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BY DOUG SMITH

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PALMS—A touch of territorial consciousness can be a good thing for the spirit of a small community.

But this community, whose boundaries, according to David I. Worsfold, historian and honorary mayor, are the most abused, slighted and trampled on in the West Side, needs something more than that.

"This is the orphan community," said Worsfold. "Its land has been stolen and now people don't even want to recognize what is left. They insist on calling it Culver City, or Cheviot Hills, or West Los Angeles. But it is legally Palms and has been for 86 years."

The presently accepted boundaries of Palms, according to Worsfold, do not conform exactly either to the postal zone or the annexation boundaries. Roughly Palms is bounded on the west by the San Diego Freeway, the south by Culver City, the east by Fairfax Ave., and the north by an uneven line following Sawyer St. to Beverwil Drive, Castle Heights Drive, Club Drive, Manning Ave., National Blvd. and back to the freeway.

Worsfold, who has spent 40 years as a map maker for the Department of Water and Power, has seen a lot of the deprecation of Palms. And his research has uncovered ghosts of the West Side that had been long forgotten.

He has a map, for instance, printed by the U.S. Geological Survey

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Honorary Mayor Fights for Palms' Identity

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in 1894, that shows Palms with 35 buildings as the only recognized town between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

The Palms School District, established in 1888, included territory in what now is Westwood, Beverly Hills, Baldwin Hills, and Mar Vista, Worsfold said. The Palms Post Office in those days served all of the West Side except Santa Monica.

"I've seen the entire growth of La Ballona Valley," Worsfold said. "This was all farms and vineyards and walnut groves when I was a boy. I went to second grade in the old Palms School that my dad helped to tear down."

Those were the glorious days of Palms.

The crisis began the year before Worsfold came to Palms from Corvallis, Ore., in 1914.

"It started," he said, "when Harry Culver came to Palms, formed the Culver Investment Co., bought 93 acres to subdivide, and put his name on what had legally been Palms for 22 years.

"I saw what was happening. They were advertising a new city even though it didn't exist. The citizens of Palms realized that only if they annexed to Los Angeles could they permanently save the community."

New Boundaries

The election was held in 1914 but failed to get the required two-thirds majority because of opposition around Washington and La Cienega Bldvs.

The leaders of Palms formed new boundaries, eliminating the areas of opposition, and a second election succeeded a month later. On May 22, 1915, Los Angeles accepted Palms into the city.

But the threat was not over, Worsfold said. Culver City incorporated in 1921.

"They put out a brochure," said Worsfold, "with a photograph of Palms Elementary School on the cover and they called it Palms High in Culver City. You see what they did? They invented a school that didn't exist and they put it in Culver City."

Worsfold claims part credit for himself for the present location of Hamilton High in Palms.

"The minute it was published that the Board of Education was looking for a site to build a high school on the West Side, Culver City proposed Fairfax and Adams so they could withdraw from the

district and have their own school already built, the way Beverly Hills had done."

The site proposed in Palms was rejected because the Department of Water and Power already owned a portion of the land. But Worsfold, as the department map maker, persuaded the department to trade its land for a piece 200 feet south, which is where its substation stands today, now almost surrounded by the growth of Hamilton High.

"But" said Worsfold, "the minute we got Hamilton High in Palms, that was 1930, they put it on their brochure and called it Hamilton High in Culver City because they had the temerity to magnify themselves.

"If you have the money you can take over and change the name of a place and everybody will recognize it, whether it is right or wrong.

'Sincere Historian'

"Look at Cheviot Hills. It's not official, not a recorded name, not a school, not a post office, but they want to make it exclusive so they call it Cheviot Hills and society accepts it. Legally it is still Palms.

"I'm a sincere historian and a map maker and I want things correct. We've had a long fight to get proper recognition for Palms."

The fight, in fact, is still not over. And Worsfold has evidence to prove it.

On the American Automobile Assn. map of West Los Angeles, printed a few years ago, a small circle marked the center of Culver City. The name Culver City, said Worsfold, had casually been printed through the circle right over the center of Palms. The name Palms appeared in smaller letters in a corner of the community.

By complaining to the company, Worsfold managed to have the name removed in the second edition of the map and placed entirely in Culver City. And to prove it, he says, there is still a gap in the circle where the name Culver City used to be.

Perhaps without a man like David Worsfold to protect it, the oldest community on the West Side might already have been printed over and forgotten.