



... HISTORY OF ...
JOHN CARROLL
and
CARROLL
PARK

JOHN CARROLL AND CARROLL PARK

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The imposing three-story New England style home of John Carroll, developer of Carroll Park Tract, is gone. A church and parking lot occupy the site. So is the formal garden, remembered for its lush tropical plantings and unusual flowering trees, reminiscent of those that had grown in his garden in Singapore. Still intact, however, is the maze of streets that mark the first planned housing tract in Long Beach. But even the original names have been changed: **Huerta**, Spanish for orchard, because as John Carroll said in October 1902, the thirty-acre tract had included an olive orchard on the site of his house;¹ **Hechezur** meaning enchanted or bewitched. Bewitched he would have been with the mild climate of Long Beach and its reputation as a health resort. It was said that John and Elizabeth Jane Carroll had left hot and humid Singapore for their daughter's health.² Presumably she was tubercular.

One street was named for the developer himself. That was **Carrollton**, which swung up to the wide veranda of his home. Another probably was a misprint on the map that was ready to be recorded and simply left to stay. The map was prepared by Captain Charles T. Healey who earlier had surveyed Willmore City and the American Colony.

The street in question was **Tingling**. Children who grew up in the tract before the streets became Carroll Park East, South, North and West respectively, called it Ting-a-Ling. According to Mrs. Irlene Cooper Bly who lived there as a child, it had been named for Madame **Katherine Tingley**, leader and official head of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society at Point Loma, near San Diego. Irlene's father had gotten his information from a gentleman named Espy who considered himself the historian of the Park.³

Symbols played an important part in the layout of the Point Loma Homestead, or commune, the unbroken curve or ellipse symbolizing continuity and finality. During the Middle Ages it was believed that encirclement would prevent the soul, in its critical state, from leaving the body. Consciously or unconsciously Carroll could have been protecting his family and his dream development.

Regardless of whether or not the street was named for Madame Tingley, Gus A. Walker, president of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank, insists that there was a very practical reason for the pattern of streets.⁴ His father, banker and realtor C. J. Walker, was closely allied with Carroll in the development. One of the problems they wished to avoid was having farmers and ranchers cutting through the Park on their way to town. So they decided that a complicated layout of streets would force the wagons onto Fourth Street or Eliot (Third Street). Since nearly everyone in Southern California had visited the Point Loma Homestead either out of curiosity about the so-called cult, or to admire the grounds with their newly-introduced avocado orchards and other sub-tropicals, Carroll could have used a modification of the Homestead plans and given Madame Tingley credit.

The Long Beach **Press** of Oct. 3, 1902 spoke glowingly of Carroll's "Splendid Addition . . . which will make it eventually one of the finest on the coast." Already a "first class landscape artist" had been employed.

The center of the tract is made in the form of an ellipse entirely surrounded by a fine driveway. Driveways are swung out to the surrounding streets in such a way as to preserve the curves and at the same time dividing the outside sections in the most favorable manner. At each of the corner intersections a small park is left which is being beautified and will add very materially to the general appearance of the tract. . .

Here, then, was the first thoughtfully planned residential tract in Long Beach.

As 1902 came to a close the stage was set for Carroll and Walker. Sales were gratifying. Prominent people were ready to build—bankers, doctors, attorneys and other professionals plus a fair number of well-to-do retired easterners. It was a healthy mix of residents.

Attractive to families with children was the elementary school that had been relocated from farther west on Third Street to the northwest corner of Fourth and Junipero. Providing culture along with reading and entertainment was Alamitos Library which also served as a sort of town hall for the entire Alamitos Townsite.

Carroll found time for good deeds, too. The Episcopal Church had a debt hanging heavy over it. And according to the ever loyal **Press**, "The Honorable "John Carroll took it upon himself to raise money to retire the debt in but a few hectic days." ⁵

Another good deed (it is suspected) involved the so-called sale of a home by Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Walker, Mr. and Mrs. Carroll and a wealthy easterner, Mrs. Jennie A. Reeve, to the daughter of General John Fremont.⁶ Miss Elizabeth Benton Fremont (Lily) was known to be in dire straits following the death of her mother in Los Angeles. Fremont had been revered by Angelenos for his conquest of California in 1846, so helping Lily to acquire a snug cottage in healthful Long Beach would seem a small thing to do. The sturdy house still stands on Junipero, virtually unchanged even to the old marble wash basin and some bathroom fittings.

The next year saw Carroll applying for and winning a franchise for laying pipes and selling water to residents of Long Beach with the assurance that water would be furnished free to the fire department. Already he had acquired land and drilled a test well north of Signal Hill. He also agreed to sell the system to the city at some future time, thus paving the way for the present municipal water system.⁷

Upon a choice lot just below the corner of Fourth and Junipero, Carroll's own home took shape—a three story frame mansion of New England architecture. Verandas extended around three sides of the first two floors, and a widow's walk around the smaller third story which held the ballroom. At first glance a widow's walk seems pretentious until one considers that there were only a few houses set in farms, orchards, and eucalyptus groves between Carroll Park and the ocean. So it is possible that there was a distant view of the ocean and

Catalina Island.

Irlene Bly⁸ and Helen Metzger McCaleb⁹—whose family moved into their six year old craftsman chalet in 1913—have different memories of the Carroll house. Irlene's centers on the verandas and lovely garden. Helen remembers her awe at the immense bathroom done in green tile and equipped with ornate brass fittings.

Who was this human dynamo who descended on Long Beach with so many ideas and so much enthusiasm?

Certainly not a young man. Carroll was forty-eight in 1902 when he came to Long Beach as a resident.¹⁰ A native of Ireland, he entered the United States in 1894 and must have left very shortly for Singapore where he was manager of the largest tin smelting plant in the world.¹¹ That he was even then interested in Long Beach is attested to by the *Press* of July 1898 which bragged that of its 560 subscribers there was one who resided in Singapore¹² and that it took thirty-seven days for his copy to reach him. If he was interested in business possibilities in Long Beach, it was hardly news by then. Sometime prior to this he had visited Long Beach, according to a 1934 interview with Clark Shaw. Carroll had stayed with the Shaws several times during "the late '90s."¹³ The move to Long Beach had been because of the health of the Carroll daughter.

About Elizabeth Jane Carroll even less is known. She was born in Cornwall, England in 1870, making her considerably younger than her husband. Records indicate that she did not come to the United States as a resident until 1902 and then directly to California.¹⁴ Her name does not appear on the yearbooks of the Ebell Club to which most women of affluence and education belonged.¹⁵ She was a member of the Alamitos Library Association which she and her husband supported.¹⁶ If there were dances in the third floor ballroom in her home, no records of them have been found.

Carroll, himself, must have been an outgoing, charming man. The *Press* seemed much impressed with him. He must have enjoyed challenges. Before long he became vice president of the First National Bank¹⁷ and served on the boards of it, the Seaside Water Company and the newly formed Citizens' Water, Light, and Power Company.¹⁸ He began investing in mining enterprises and probably desert properties. Then came the severe depression of 1907. Many banks, in order to survive, were forced to issue fiat money. This was paper currency made legal tender but not backed by gold or silver and not necessarily redeemable in coin. The First National Bank¹⁹ was not forced to do this, but Carroll, who had invested too heavily or not too well, was in trouble. That year, although still listed as a bank officer, he was residing in Victorville, whether for business reasons or for his daughter's health.

Thus ended the Carrolls' brief but important stay in Long Beach. But bad luck continued to dog them. They were forced to deed certain properties to the First National Bank; his house was sold to a bank official,²⁰ and in 1909 he deeded the small planted section of the Park to the city for back taxes.²¹ Records show that one by one he sold off his remaining properties in Long Beach. He was ranching in Mecca in 1917.²² One wonders if the ebullient Irishman hoped to recoup his fortune in the new, exciting industry there—date growing.

During the Depression of the '30s he died in the Riverside County Hospital at

eighty-three, spared the knowledge that his dream home in Long Beach would some day be razed to make way for a church. Within six months his widow died. Records show that she had been reduced to receiving welfare, and the State was asking permission to sell her personal effects in order to defray funeral expenses.²³

But John Carroll's housing development has endured. At least a dozen houses and three barns built during his brief tenure here still stand. In all, about seventy-five houses in the Park predate 1940.²⁴ Some are modest, others impressive. All are well-tended. The same mix of professional, non-professional, and varying age groups exists. Thanks to Carroll, wagons never lumbered through the Park raising dust and endangering children at play. Being a sort of small enclave, the Park enjoys a feeling of friendliness, solidarity and pride.

Regardless of whatever happened to the Carrolls in later years, Carroll Park stands as a tribute to an ingenious and public-spirited Irishman.



SOURCE MATERIAL

¹Long Beach Semi-Weekly Press, October 3, 1902.

²Long Beach Sun, July 25, 1934.

³Interview, Mrs. Irlene Cooper Bly, November 1981, January 25, 1982.

⁴Interview, Gus A. Walker, January 22, 1982.

⁵Long Beach Semiweekly Press, Nov. 1902.

⁶Los Angeles County Hall of Records: Deeds.

⁷Long Beach Press, January 30, 1903.

⁸Interview, Bly.

⁹Interview, Helen Metzger McCaleb, December 30, 1981.

¹⁰Riverside County Hall of Records: from death certificate.

¹¹Press, January 24, 1934.

¹²Press, July 1898.

¹³Case, Walter H., *Did You Know That?* Scrapbook, of July 25, 1934.

¹⁴Riverside County Hall of Records: from death certificate.

¹⁵Ebell Club Yearbooks, 1902-1910.

¹⁶Alamitos Library Association Minutes, 1906.

¹⁷Long Beach City Directories 1902-1906.

¹⁸Case, Walter H. *Long Beach and Vicinity*, (Chicago: S. J. Clark Co.) 1927 00224-225.

¹⁹Gus A. Walker.

²⁰Los Angeles County Hall of Records, 1910, John and Jane Carroll to R. D. Judkins.

²¹Press, November 22, 1909.

²²Riverside County Directories, 1911-1910.

²³Riverside County Hall of Records: Deaths and Probate.

²⁴Long Beach Cultural Heritage Survey, *Carroll Park Survey*, (Long Beach: Department of Planning and Building) 1981.