

Historical Society

Laguna Beach Life | Past | Present | Future

Mark Your Calendar For Our Upcoming Programs and Events!

MARCH 5th Program

The Historic Sewage Treatment Plant [aka "the Digester"]

Susi Q Community Center

7:30-9:30 pm (doors open at 7:00 pm)

The Historic Sewage Treatment Plant [aka "the Digester"]

Thursday, March 5th, 7:30-9:30 pm

Robert Borthwick • Krista Nicholds • Glenna Matthews

On March 5th, the Laguna Beach Historical Society will present a program on the historic Sewage Treatment Plant [aka "the Digester"]. This facility ceased operation in 1983, and in 1989, most of the plant was demolished with the exception of the Digester and adjacent office, which was saved. In his 2014 book titled "The New Deal in Orange County", author Charles Epting refers to the Digester as "the most interesting sewage treatment plant in the county". Designed with a Normandy castle tower, winding exterior stairway, and a Mediterranean influence, the remaining structure has been an iconic sentinel at the Village Entrance for over 85 years. Many people feel that this quaint and charming building embodies the special artistic qualities of Laguna Beach. On September 25, the City Council voted 3-2 to demolish the Digester and an EIR is pending.

The Sewage Treatment Plant was completed in 1935 with New Deal federal funding, and helped to make Laguna a functioning town. Building the sewer plant created many construction jobs for local unemployed residents at the depth of the Great Depression, and saved local families from economic devastation. In the past decades, the office portion of the structure has served as a storage facility for police evidence, and the tower structure is vacant.

The building is built with solid reinforced concrete walls nearly a foot thick, so its bones are strong although the (continued on page 2)

Photograph top left: The Digester building including original spiral staircase.

Photograph bottom left: The Digester building as it stands today.



FIG. 2.—Tower in Laguna Beach, California, Sewage Treatment Works before planting. R. D. Woodward, Superintendent.



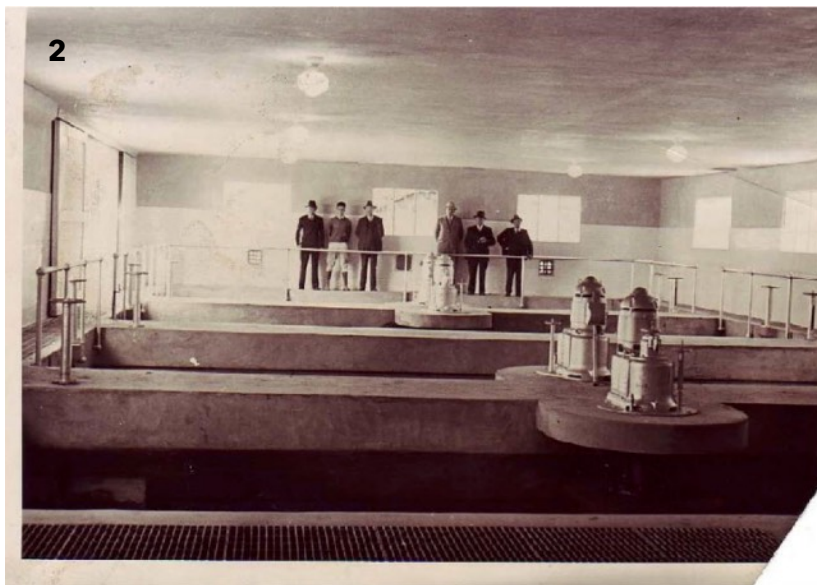
exterior has faded over the years. The Digester tower extends some 20 feet underground, and the remaining composted material from almost 40 years ago will soon be removed in preparation for either demolition or preservation of the structure.



The program will be presented by Bob Borthwick - local resident and landscape architect, Krista Nicholds - Historic Resources Specialist and President of Preserve Orange County, and Glenna Matthews - local resident and retired professor of American History.

Photograph 1: The original plant prior to 1989 demolition.

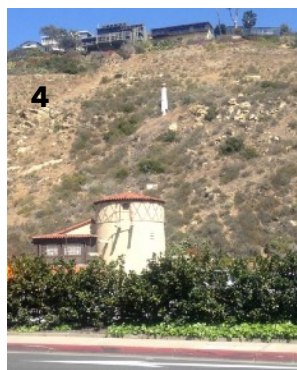
Photograph 2: The interior of the Laguna Beach Old Sewage Disposal during the 1938 California Sewage Works Association Conference and the Laguna Beach Plant Tour. Image taken from the National Archives and Records Administration.



Photograph 3: The venting pipe was designed to resemble a lighthouse.

Photograph 4: Lighthouse on the hill.

"The 1935 Laguna Beach Sewage Treatment Plant is a significant surviving public works facility from a community that greatly upgraded its infrastructure in the 1930's with New Deal assistance to accommodate projected growth. The town could not become the popular artistic and tourist destination without this facility. The facility design, intended to blend with the romantic geography and early twentieth century architecture of the community, now is a major landmark for the town. It retains strong integrity aspects of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, setting, and association."



- From: Cultural Resources Reconnaissance for the Village Entrance Project, Laguna Beach, California, SWCA Cultural Resources Report Database No. 2006-200, April 2006.

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The bungalow in Laguna Beach is our beloved home, but we are working toward securing a permanent archive for display and research of our treasury of historic documents and information. Your generous contributions will help us reach our goals which also include expanding our space for hosting members and guests at our programs and events.

Thank you again for your past support and please consider increasing your support to this important preserver of Laguna Beach's History.

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Laguna Beach Historical Society
278 Ocean Avenue
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

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