

# Manhattan: isle's sandman

By Rex Dalton  
Staff writer

*With the omnipresent Diamond Head towering in the background etching an everlasting memory of tranquility, you enjoy the majestic spectacle of the enchanting island of Oahu while consuming the pungent, floral fragrances as the white, fine-grained sand of Waikiki Beach provides a relaxing cushion.*

One might not guess it, but an area of the South Bay is responsible for an integral part of the pleasures of Hawaii, referred to in the quote above from a travel brochure.

In the early 1920's when developers in the Hawaiian Islands were looking for beautiful, fine-grained, white, beach sand, they found it in Manhattan Beach.

In fact, all the sand on Waikiki Beach is from sand dunes, excavations and construction sites in Manhattan Beach.

And Marshall Kuhn and his brother, Bob, owners of Kuhn Bros. Construction Co. and Builders Materials Co. supplied the sand.

Operating from the corner of Valley Drive and Manhattan Beach Boulevard, Kuhn, and his now deceased brother, Bob, gave the island paradise the one thing it was missing.

"We had so much sand at

times," the 70-year resident of Manhattan Beach says, "we had to give it to them.

"A guy came over from Hawaii looking for sand to cover the rock beaches on the islands.

"The sand was becoming more and more of a problem for us with the increasing growth of the community.

"My brother and I were taking the sand and using it to fill a gulley that ran parallel to the coast about where the Sante Fe rail line now is. But we had too much.

"Our company was the only one around who had the equipment to handle the operation. We would haul it up from the beach, load it onto railroad cars, have it transported to the harbor in San Pedro and shipped by barge or ship to Hawaii.

"The Sante Fe and Southern Pacific Railroads were buying most of it before that to use as ballast and to sand the tracks.

"Selling it to those guys from the islands was quite a lucrative deal. We sold it to them for years and years. They looked all over and felt we had the best sand they could get, so they gave us all their business.

"Makes me feel kind of proud," Kuhn says, relaxing under the canopy of avocado trees in his backyard.

"We were the only ones who supplied the sand to build those beaches. If it wasn't for Manhattan Beach's sand, Hawaii might not be what it is today."

Getting such a contract wasn't any easy proposition, nor would it pay all the bills, Kuhn adds.

"Our main business was construction. We built miles of roads and sidewalks in Manhattan Beach and the South Bay, supplied the sand for the construction of much of the Coliseum and paved Pacific Coast Highway from Redondo Beach to Lomita.

"Building PCH was a heck of a job. The company lost all kinds of money on that job.

"After grading and preparing the road bed for the pavement, we would come back the next day to pave and find the farmers had driven their horse-drawn wagons along the road turning it into a sea of ruts.

"I can't remember how many times we graded the road before we finally got the pavement down."

But over the years Kuhn Bros. prospered and the hardships of the era blossomed into rewards.

The Kuhns settled in an area known as "The Knoll," an area between Second and Sixth Streets and Meadows and Rowell Avenues.

Ruth Kuhn's father had

retired there around the turn of the century in a house on Fifth Street across from where she and her husband now live.

Kuhn's father was a motorman for Pacific Electric, along with being the water and street superintendent, building inspector, marshal and the rest of the city positions.

"In those days," Kuhn says, "one man got paid \$100 to do them all."

"We started on this site camping out in the late 1920's in a cabin," Mrs. Kuhn says.

"Over the years we bought 25 acres, the entire 'Knoll,' but we have had to sell all the land except for the five lots the house and avocado grove are on. The taxes were just too high.

"It's rough to keep this much up, nowadays," she says with a sigh of regret.

Not to imply the Kuhns are hurting financially, but because of the intelligent frugality and good sense that has dominated their lives they say they find it hard to rationalize today's high costs.

"Our water bill has been up to \$156 some times, because of the amount of water the avocado trees need," they say.

"It seems unnecessary for things to cost so much, but we'll live our life as best we can, like we always have."



Marshall Kuhn, 77, Manhattan Beach, picks a orange lime from one of the various trees that compose his backyard grove.

Staff photo by Bill Cameron  
Kuhn's construction firm supplied the sand for Waikiki Beach, Hawaii.

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