

Oct 7, 1964

Former Brea Mayor Recalls 'Calmest' Days

In the early days, Carlson became a truck driver when he was 12. Trucks were a new thing in those days and a person who could drive could find a job no matter how young he was, he explained. By the time he was 13, he owned a garage in Placentia and stayed with the mechanic trade for many years.

By the time he was 15, he had switched to race cars and was building up his own speedsters. He converted a 1907 Packard and left for the Phoenix Road Race but ran into trouble.

He drove the racer all the way to Phoenix, including a ferry trip across the Colorado River. When he arrived, they would not let him enter the race without a new set of tires, which he couldn't afford.

A few years later, he switched to airplane-building and became an aviator himself after a frightening experience. He said he was flying with a French pilot out of the old Brea Airport one afternoon when they spotted a bridge across the small creek east of what is now the Union Oil Co. Research plant on Imperial Hwy.

"The pilot asked if the plane would fit under the little bridge and I suggested we land and push it under to see. He decided otherwise and flew under at full throttle. That's when I decided to learn to fly myself," Carlson helped construct the famous Brea Hummingbird here, about which many families are circulated in this

area. The plane was the first low-wing cantilever craft ever built and had no external guy wires or struts.

"The little plane came to a disastrous end in Brea, and the pilot Ray Freeman of Anaheim, was killed.

"We had an air show here that day," Carlson recalls, "and a group of De Havilland bombers were performing for the crowds. Freeman decided to make a few runs on the bombers with the Hummingbird and pulled the wings off the plane," he said.

He explained that the little craft was first flown powered with a motorcycle engine. Later they installed a larger three-cylinder Italian engine, but it was too powerful for the plane.

"I set a governor on the engine to reduce the power, but Freeman took it off. It was just too much power for the small plane and it crashed," he said.

He worked on several other "home-made" aircraft, including one huge twin-engine plane that was designed and built in Placentia and Brea to be entered in the Honolulu race. The plane carried 1,100 gallons of gasoline and one of his jobs was to weld a system of battle plates inside the tanks.

When the plane was completed and tested here, the builders found it to be an excellent plane and a top contender in the race. Carlson said the rules in those days included a final check by Navy pilots of all plans in the race to assure flyability for the long over-water flight.

PLANE CRASHED

"We flew the plane down to San Diego and turned it over to the Navy for checking," he said. "Several days later, they were up flying and the fog rolled in. They smacked the hills at Point Loma and completely destroyed the plane and killed the pilots," he said.

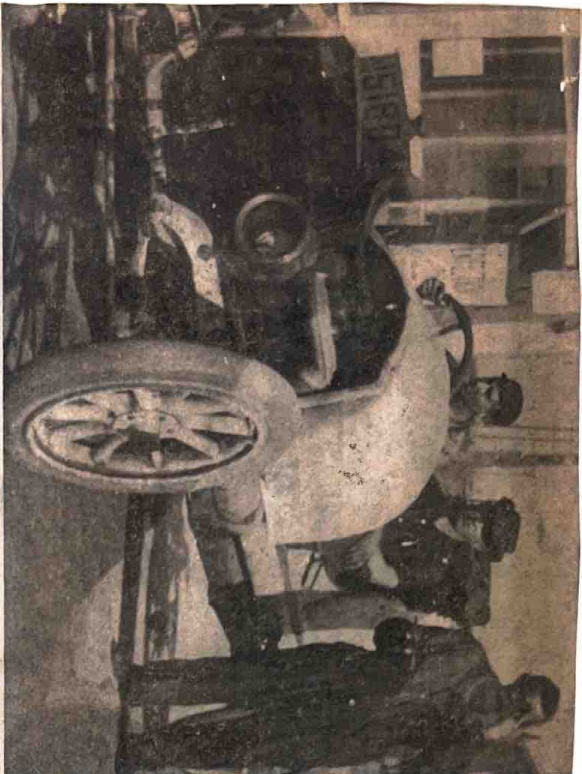
By 1942, when he was first elected to the City Council, Carlson was working for a large oil field instrument company in Los Angeles. He became mayor in 1945.

He said his biggest accomplishment during his terms on the City Council was bringing Metropolitan water to Brea.

"We had a terrible water system in those days and our well water was so hard that it was almost undrinkable. We also had water from the La Habra Water Co., but it was primarily irrigation water and came here in an open ditch after running through barnyards all the way from Los Angeles County," he said.

LINK TO MWD

They told him that joining Metropolitan was impossible because the community had to have an assessed valuation of at least \$11 million. He worked with attorneys and water experts in the area and found that they could join if a larger entity helped them out. He began the long task of attempting to get help from the Irvine Ranch Co. along with other councilmen and A. W. Studobaker, now city water superintendent.



RACE-DRIVING MAYOR — Emil Carlson, mayor of Brea in 1945, has a past that includes race driving and flying. Shown above at the wheel of his 1907 converted Packard, Carlson won many local road races at

the age of 15. He was a truck driver at the age of 12 and one of the nation's pioneer aircraft builders. He helped construct the famous Brea Hummingbird and flew the craft out of the old Brea airport.

By RAY RHOADS
BREA — A Brea mayor of 25 years ago said the old days were not so tedious and hectic in the city. He was a race driver, aircraft builder and flyer, truck driver, mechanic and carpenter, to name a few activities.

Emil Carlson, who lives on Laurel St., was born in Placentia and moved to Brea in 1920 when "there was almost nothing to the city."

He was elected to the City Council in 1942 and claimed that there was no "bickering and fighting" in those days.

"Maybe it was because there wasn't the battles to be elected then," he said. "A man in town said I should be on the council and I thought he was kidding. He filed my name and I was placed on the ballot. I forgot now whom I voted for but it wasn't for myself."

An indication of the difference in the way things were handled

Carlson knew several of the members of the Irvine Board of Directors, but he said he couldn't seem to convince them that they should "stick their necks out for Brea."

"We went to a final meeting with them and fully expected to thank them for their trouble and give the whole thing up," the ex-mayor said. "Just as a parting shot I told the board that this was like the story about the little boy who wanted a drink out of a water fountain but he was too short. The old man came by and lifted the little boy up and gave him a drink. I told the board that we were the little boy and they were the old man. They burst out laughing and voted to give us the necessary assistance and we joined Metropolitan," he declared.

FIRST GLASS

He said they tied into the main line in front of the high school and they drew off the first glass of water for him as mayor to drink.

"We look pictures and were very happy, but when I started to drink the water, it was so dirty I waited until the cameramen were gone and threw it away," he laughed.

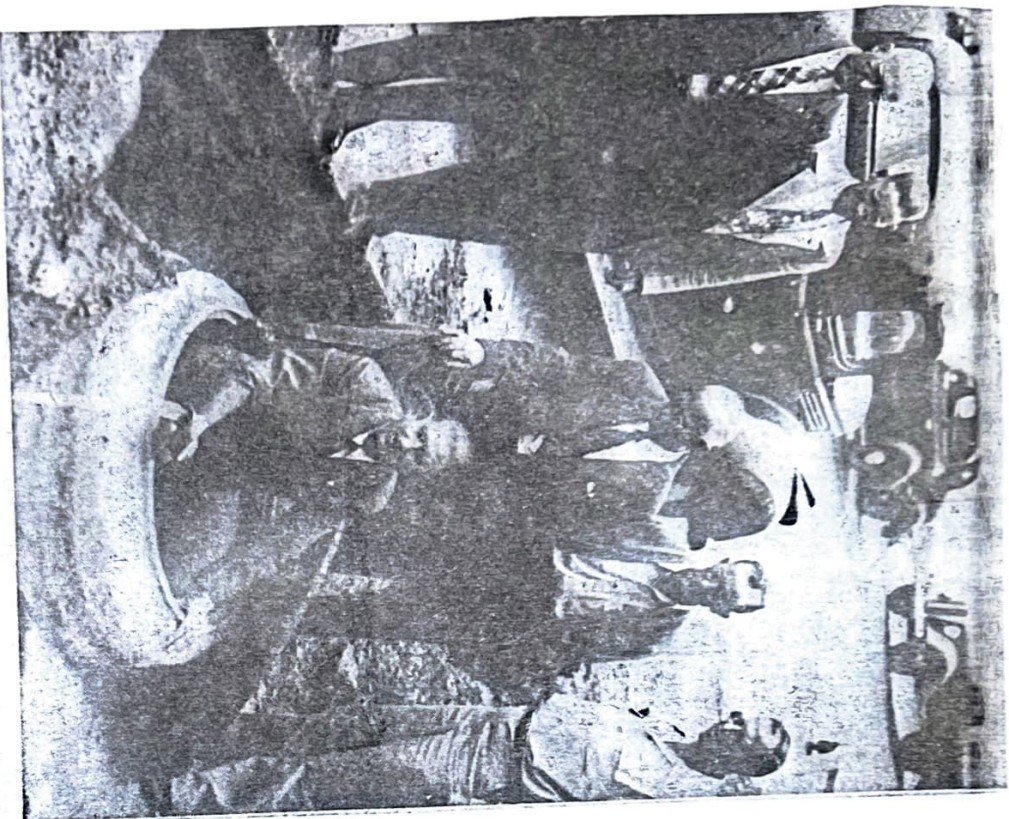
Now retired, Carlson says he keeps busy with a little carpenter and shop work at his home on Laurel. He remembers his first carpenter attempt when he built a home on Birch St. just east of Flower St.

"There were no homes in the area at all in those days," he recalls. "I didn't have a n.y. building permits but it worked out all right. It is still standing today and is a pretty good house," he chuckled.



WATER FOR BREA — Emil Carlson (center) gloats over the first Metropolitan water to come to Brea after his long battle as mayor to bring the system to the city. Shown at dedication ceremonies are (left to right) an unidentified Metropolitan official,

Councilman Hugh Jones, Councilman Ray Monroe, Mayor Carlson, Councilman Bill Shire and A. W. Studebaker. Carlson said the city accomplished an almost impossible feat in joining Metropolitan without the required assessed valuation.



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